SHORT STORIES

No. 801. Week Ending May 7, 1904. Price One Penny.

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(An Exciting Incident from "The Scheming of Basil Thornton." See inside.)

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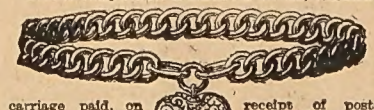

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BODLEIAN 4 MAY 1904

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SHORT STORIES

No. 801.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending May 7th, 1904.

The Wife of Dudley Holland.

Telling the Terrible Story of Her Married Life.

DUDLEY HOLLAND was my chum at Oxford. Neither of us had a brother of our own, and I think two brothers were never dearer to each other than we were.

Two years after we graduated I was in town, partly for pleasure, partly on business, when I received a letter from Dudley, telling me that he had fallen in love.

His letter was full of adjectives and exclamation points. There never before was a woman so enchanting as this Edith Champney. She was transcendently beautiful, but that was her least charm. But there was one drawback. She was cold. Ice was not so hopeless, for ice melts under a warm sun, and it seemed that all the sunshine of adulation and adoration that surrounded Miss Champney could not melt her. He could not tell whether he had been able to produce the slightest impression on her. She listened to him very sweetly, but she listened just as patiently the ensuing five minutes to his next neighbour. There was a strange mystery in her bearing, and he meant to fathom it.

It was three weeks before I heard from him again. This is what he wrote:

I have solved the mystery, Ralph, and I love her more than ever. She is so cold to all because she fears to love anyone, or let anyone love her. Her mother was insane for many years before her death; died, in fact, in a lunatic asylum. Edith fears that she may inherit this malady; and is conscientiously resolved for that reason against marriage. I believe now that she could love me; nay, that she is already beginning to. She must! She shall! I will reason her out of her scruples. I believe I should marry her if I knew she would be mad in a year.

She must be my wife. I long for you to see her, Ralph. I know you will understand my heart's desire.

There was a page or two more of rhapsody about her charms, but I scarcely read it, so excited was I over the portion which I have quoted.

"Thinks he would marry her if he knew she would be insane in a year!" I muttered. "Why, he is as mad as a March hare himself! I must go to him."

I did not answer his letter. I thought any opposition of that kind would only strengthen his purpose; and I trusted to be with him in time to prevent any serious entanglement. I made all possible haste in settling up my affairs, and in two weeks I was in Bath. I went straight to his lodgings and found him putting the last touches to his toilet, for, like most men, young, rich, and idle, he dressed with almost as much care and taste as a woman.

It was just dusk when I opened his door. He came towards me with extended hands.

"Just in time, Ralph!" he cried joyously. "You shall go with me to see her to-night. I have over-ruled all her scruples. She loves me! We are engaged, and next month we shall be married. The day is fixed."

My heart failed me. I was too late, after all. I listened to him in sad silence. At length he noticed my manner.

"You don't like it, Ralph? I am sorry; but you will change your mind when you have seen her. She is the noblest, truest, tenderest woman—and she loves me so! She never allowed herself to think of marriage before; and I hold her first love, the full, passionate overflowing of her rich nature—the fountain sealed so long. Come, I am impatient till you see her!"

I went out with him, and he hurried me along the streets. We were always so—I, cool, patient, slow; he, quick, impulsive, passionate, hurrying me onward. Soon we stopped before a noble mansion. Dudley spoke to the servant who admitted us with the familiar air of a frequent visitor. He conducted me upstairs himself, and threw open the drawing-room door.

At one end of the room, between two long windows, stood a harp, and, beside it, Miss Champney. A chandelier near her was fully lighted, and, standing for an instant in comparative darkness at the door by which we entered, while my friend went forward to speak to her, I had space and opportunity to see what manner of woman she was.

Dudley had not overstated her attractions. Of lofty, commanding figure, her proportions were perfect. Her carriage was stately, as would have befitted the descendant of a line of princes. Her face was more nobly beautiful than any countenance I have ever seen. There was no trace of colour in it save in the lips, and they were bright as a scarlet geranium flower. But no colour could have rivalled the clear, grand whiteness of her complexion—marble, with the warm, palpitating softness of life. Her eyes were large, black, and languid, with a peculiar expression of passionate melancholy.

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She started forward when she saw my friend. Her eyes kindled. A sudden flush stained the clear whiteness of her cheek. She murmured a word or two of which I only caught the fond, caressing intonation of her voice. I forgave him for loving her; for the mad risk he was running. She was a woman worth living or dying for. Had I seen her before she was his, I believe, with my slow, persistent, intense nature, I should have loved her better and longer than he could.

Instantly, almost, he led her forward to speak to me. She welcomed me with graceful cordiality as his friend. We passed a pleasant evening—one which I can never forget. Before it was over she sang to us. Her snowy fingers flashed like a flock of white birds across the strings of the harp. Her voice was full and rich, and very sweet, but sad with a passionate, inexpressible longing, like the cry of a struggling soul. It thrilled me to pain.

"What do you think of her?" Dudley asked me, walking home beside me in the moonlight.

"I understand all you wrote me now," I said, meeting his eyes. "I tell you honestly that I hurried here in the hope of preventing this; but now that I have seen her, I cannot wonder that you had no power or will to struggle against your love. God grant that it may bring you only happiness! It seems as if she were a creature too noble for a destiny of suffering."

* * * * *

The next month, as had been planned, they were married.

When they had returned home, she went upstairs to change her bridal dress.

Half an hour afterwards, Dudley Holland went to seek his bride.

"She must be ready now," he said to me, as he went out; "perhaps she is waiting for me."

I don't think it was two minutes before I heard a shriek—a wild, maniacal shriek—which seemed to freeze the blood in my veins with icy terror. I stepped into the hall, and saw a white figure flying down the stairs—Edith, in her bridal robes still, except that her veil had been torn off, and her long, black hair, with an orange blossom still clinging to it here and there, was floating in heavy, dishevelled masses about her shoulders. Down she came, holding in her hand a dagger, its point stained with blood. Swifter than lightning she flashed by me into the empty drawing-room.

Sweeping her hand across the strings of her harp, till all its chords clashed together in one wild shriek of discord, she stood there, waving the dagger above her head, like some beautiful fiend, torn with madness.

Slowly, as one stricken in an unguarded hour with some terrible blow, her bridegroom came after her. From a wound in his shoulder the blood was oozing out. His eyes were set in a stony gaze of horror.

"Has she hurt you?" I cried, confronting him.

"Not much, I think. But, Ralph, it has come—all you feared. She is mad!"

His voice sank, as he spoke, into a husky, sepulchral whisper. He went into the drawing-room, I following him. He would have gone towards her—I believe he loved her so in that hour, he would rather have met his death at her hand, than live to have this awful chasm—this unbridged gulf of madness—between his heart and hers. She looked at him now with that curious gaze of cunning and defiance which everyone has seen who knows much of the insane.

"Keep away," she cried warningly, flashing the dagger before her—"you had better. I sha'n't kill you, for you don't fear that; but if you come one step nearer, I will let this pretty, shining toy lap the blood out of my heart."

There was a terrible earnestness in her eyes and we both stood still before her.

At this moment her father appeared on the scene. He comprehended all in an instant. His face turned white to his lips with an awful pallor. The cold sweat-drops of a deathly agony stood upon his forehead.

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried, "has it come so soon? I saw her mother look like that. Dudley, I warned you. You rushed upon your fate!"

"I believe I should have married her had I known this, even. At least she is my wife. I know that she has loved me!"

With that white pallor on his face, that look of anguish in his eyes, Richard Champney turned towards his child.

"Give me that dagger, Edith," he said in a tone of stern command, walking up to her suddenly. With a child-like instinct of obedience she put it into his hand. Then, as if repenting what she had done, she sprang wildly forward to seize it again.

He threw it quickly behind him, and caught her firmly in his arms as she came on. I took up the weapon and broke it, and threw the pieces out of the window. Still holding her, her father contrived to extract a key from his pocket, and threw it towards me.

"In my room—one over this—you will find, in the third drawer, a strait waistcoat. It was the one her mother wore. Bring it."

In five minutes more, with my help, he had put it on her, and it was out of her power to do any more mischief to herself or others.

Then I sent a servant for the family physician, and went myself for a surgeon. While the physician was alone with Richard Champney and his hapless child, the surgeon dressed the bridegroom's wound. It was a flesh-wound and not dangerous. But what a wedding-day! What a consummation to the blissful dreams of so many hopeful weeks!

Soon the doctor came out. Dudley looked at him in mute, helpless anguish, his lips refusing to frame the question he longed to ask. I asked it for him.

"Do you think there is any hope?"

"I do not like to pronounce so soon," he answered, with a kind reluctance to speak the bitter truth.

"It would be better," I said earnestly, "to tell him the very worst now, than to torture him with suspense, if there is no hope of her recovery."

He considered for a moment before he spoke again. "I believe you are right, and I will tell you exactly what I think. Where insanity comes on, as hers has, without any illness, or any apparent cause, so suddenly and so violently, especially where there was a suspicion that it might be hereditary, I have never known it to be cured."

* * * * *

I will not dwell on the next scenes of this terrible tragedy. Both Edith's father and her husband longed, if they could, to keep her at home, where they could care for and watch over her. For a while they thought this would be possible. After the doctor's visit her strait jacket was removed. She seemed calmer, and made no more attempts to injure anyone. They thought her madness was going to take a harmless turn—gentle and pitiful as poor Ophelia's.

She did not recognise either her husband or her father; but she seemed to like them both, and called them by a dozen fantastic titles.

It went on thus for a time, until the furious, malignant stage of her malady came on again. She would fly at whoever was in charge of her, and try to tear them with teeth and nails. She would beat her own beautiful head against the walls of her rooms, or gnash her teeth against her lips till the blood burst from them. At length it was determined to take her to an asylum. She could be restrained there, they thought, by those who understood such cases, more gently, more mercifully.

It was a summer's afternoon when they drove out with her in a closed carriage. It was in one of her intervals of comparative mildness, and the thought that she was going to see the friend who was in need of her made her content to drive readily enough. In the superintending physician she seemed to think she had found the one for whom she sought; and she parted with her father and husband without a regret.

"If life did not stretch out before me," Dudley Holland cried wretchedly, "so bitterly long—if only I could die! But to live on, for God only knows how many weary years—and to think of her suffering there, her helpless soul beating its struggling wings against the bars, crying out, in vain

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anguish, for a deliverance that never comes—to know that she is my own wife who loves me; and yet I can never hear her say so, or kiss her lips, or hold her close to the heart that worships her. Oh, Heaven, perhaps it would be a mercy if I could go mad too!"

What a fate it was to overtake a man just on the threshold of life, only twenty-five—a man with so many goodly gifts, wealth, talent, manly form, and handsome face.

* * * * *

Ten years passed in utter hopelessness. Richard Champney had grown weary of his life's sad burden, and laid it down. The heart so long and sorely tried had throbbed with the last pang of mortal anguish, and with the dead smile frozen upon his mouth, and a look of peace upon his face, they buried him by his dead wife's side.

But no such merciful release had come to the beautiful creature who was wearing away her life among the motley crowd of raving, jeering maniacs; or to the husband who waited without the bars in lonely, pining sorrow.

"Come one step nearer," she cried, "and I will plunge this dagger in my heart!"

On the tenth anniversary of that ill-omened wedding-day he came and intreated me to drive with him to Sagham. I put aside all other affairs for the time and went with him.

"How is she to-day?" he asked the superintendent anxiously.

"You will see her in her room. She is as mad as ever, but quieter. She is not so strong, I think. The warm weather, which has come so suddenly, overcomes her. She is always gentlest when she does not feel very well."

"Do you think she can possibly ever get well?"

It was I who asked this question. Dudley had asked it too many times, and received the same sad, hopeless "No!" It came again now.

"Well, no, I see no hope of it. Better at times she may be; and perhaps—I have seen such things in such cases sometimes—before her death there may be a lucid interval. But it will never be, I feel certain, until she is very near her end. Sometimes the torch of reason burns up again with the old brightness when life is expiring. It may be so in her case. It is but the shadow of a hope; but it is all I can give you."

We went together to her room. Dudley had brought her his customary offering—a basket of flowers, exquisitely arranged. She sat in a low chair, swaying herself to and fro. She was dressed in white, as when I had seen her first, for that was one of her old fancies which she retained. It seemed to me that she had grown no older during the ten years since she had been there. She was thinner and paler, but her aspect was still that of the beautiful girl, standing just on the threshold of womanhood. Her husband went across the room, and, kneeling beside her, set the basket of flowers in her lap.

"See what I have brought you, darling," he said, as tenderly as one would speak to a petted child.

She looked up then, and her great black eyes rested on his face without the faintest glimmer of recognition. She smiled, with the old, rare sweetness of expression, however, and passed her fingers caressingly over the flowers in her lap.

"They are very lovely," she said. "You were very kind to bring them. I had a lover once, and he used to bring me flowers every day."

"Did he look like me?" Dudley asked, in tones husky with emotion, and I could see the sudden hope that looked eagerly out of his eyes.

She smiled again—this time a sort of quizzical, mischievous smile. Then she shook her head.

"Like you? Oh, no! He was a son of the morning, all joy, and radiance, and delight. He always brought the sunshine in with him. But you—you look like the knight of the sorrowful countenance. Do you come here because it is such a merry house? They laugh here, night and day. Sometimes I hear them at midnight. The laughs sound ghostly then, as they gurgle along the corridors. Oh, it's a merry house! Should you like to live here?"

Dudley turned away—he could not bear it. She began to sing then, to a sort of tuneful rhapsody, with all the old passionate sweetness in her voice, a melody of wild, unconnected words.

We stayed with her till towards nightfall. Then we bade her good-bye. She took a rose from among her flowers, and gave it to Dudley.

"That is for you, sorrowful knight," she said. "Keep it to remember this merry house. And this for you," and she gave me a sprig of heliotrope.

We drove home in the late afternoon. For a long time Dudley did not speak. I was driving, and he held the rose

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she had given him, tenderly between his fingers. At length he said, looking round at me, with quivering lips and eyes dark with unspoken pain:

"I cannot bear it, Ralph. It kills me to see her, and to feel that I am as utterly shut out from her heart, her life, her knowledge, as if she were dead. I loved her too well."

* * * * *

My house was the only one at which Dudley ever visited. It was not very lively, for I lived alone with my mother and one middle-aged serving woman. But it was always cheerful, and he was sure of a kindly welcome. I think he regarded my mother, sweet saintly soul that she was, with something of the same tenderness which I felt for her myself, and it was most warmly returned. His sufferings and the life of loneliness to which he was doomed moved her profoundest sympathies. She always talked to him as to a son, and I think he showed her the depth of his heart, as he could not have shown it even to me.

I went home one night—it was late in the autumn succeeding our birthday visit to Edith, and my mother met me with the air of one who has something to communicate.

"Not now," she said, with a smile, meeting my look of interrogation. "I see you have guessed that I have something to tell you; but we will wait till after tea, and then we shall have a whole evening to talk it over."

"What is the 'it' we are to talk over, mother?" I asked, when I had drawn on my slippers, and established myself in my own especial chair for the evening.

"I received a letter to-day from your Cousin Fanny. Her Aunt Windsor is dead, and she is without a home."

"Luckily she has plenty of money to procure one with," I said, not very sympathisingly, I am afraid.

"Yes, but I think, though she does not say so, that she would like to come here. She speaks sadly of the unpleasantness of going to live among strangers. I confess that I should like to have her with us."

I thought the matter over for a moment before I answered. Fanny Carpenter was the only child of my mother's sister. Her father, on his death-bed, much to my mother's regret, had confided Fanny to the care of his own sister, Mrs. Windsor, the lady of whose death we had just been informed. I knew well enough what my mother's wishes were. She longed for Fanny to come and be to her in place of the daughter she had always coveted. I knew they would be company for each other during the long days when I was away; and I was not churlish enough to have no consideration for Fanny's preference for living with her own kith and kin rather than seeking a new home among strangers. Everything was in favour of her coming, except the one selfish feeling I had that I dreaded change of any sort in our quiet, comfortable life, and that I hated the trouble of making myself agreeable to a young lady. At length I said, with a sigh of melancholy:

"I know you are right, mother. She ought to come. I should not feel happy or satisfied without asking her; still, I must say, it's a bore. She'll want me to take her here and there. There'll be an end to all such quiet, lazy nights as this."

She smiled archly.

"That will be good for you. That is one reason I want her to come. You would grow presently, if you went on in this way, with me to indulge you, into a real, selfish, one-sided old bachelor. It will be the very best thing in the world for you—good discipline."

"My Discipline!" I persisted in talking of my Cousin Fanny by that title. I had not seen her for five years. She had visited us at fifteen. She was a nice girl then—a merry, romping, teasing hoyden, who made me infinite trouble and afforded me plenty of fun. But the five years since she had passed in London, where she had been educated at a fashionable school; and I looked forward in dismay to the advent of a really fine lady.

The next day my mother wrote, inviting her to make her future home with us. By return of post the invitation was accepted, and the next fortnight was devoted to making preparations for her.

I went home one night and found that she had arrived. She was in the drawing-room, so Judith said, hurrying into the hall to tell me as I went upstairs. I would not encounter "My Discipline" till I had brushed off the dust of business. I went to my own room and refreshed my toilet a little.

Then I went down and saw, standing by the window, a small, slight, very youthful-looking girl, clad in deep mourning. She was not handsome, but there was something very winning in her face. It was a good face—sweet and pure, with pale, delicate colouring, small features, blue, innocent-looking eyes, and an expression which seemed to appeal for tenderness and protection. Full, light curls lying loose and shining about face and head, added to the extreme youthfulness of her appearance. She came forward to meet me, and put her hand in mine with a shy grace, and said, in a voice as cheery as the chirp of a little woodland bird:

"Here I am, Ralph; come here in search of home and friends. Please say I am welcome."

I could say it honestly, and I did. From that moment I took her into my heart.

She had been with us three months, when one night my mother said to me:

"Ralph, I could find it in my heart to be sorry Fanny came. I am afraid Dudley Holland is falling in love with her."

We were sitting alone over the fire in the library, I and my mother. Dudley had been spending the evening with us, and had gone away, and Fanny had gone to her own room. My mother's words startled me for a moment into vague alarm. Soon I collected myself.

"Impossible, mother!" I said resolutely. "Dudley loved Edith as I never knew man to love woman. He could not love another; above all, one so different as Fanny."

"In that very difference is the danger. He does not dream of loving Fanny. He would think himself it was impossible to love one so different from his first ideal; so he is drifting into it helplessly, without even making a struggle."

"Impossible!" I said again, resolutely.

"I hope you may be right, Ralph, but I feel sure that I am. Edith has been worse than dead to him for more than ten years. I know that he would reject with horror the thought of ever giving her place to another in his heart, but I am very sure that he is doing it, unconsciously, nevertheless."

"And Fanny?" I asked the question with an anxiety that was little short of pain.

"About that I cannot tell so well. She pities him from the depth of her womanly heart, and they say pity is akin to love; but I do not think the thought of loving him has ever entered her mind. She would shudder at it, if it should. She could never forget that he is still Edith's husband."

After that I watched Dudley Holland and my cousin closely when they were together. I could see that he was happier in her presence. The gloom which had been settling over him for years seemed to lift, as the mists roll away from the hill-top and valley when the sunlight pierces them. He seemed to like to talk with her; to exchange ideas about art and literature; sometimes about the graver problems of life and death and duty. Still I saw nothing to warrant my mother in her conclusions.

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I could fancy that if Dudley had been free, really free, Fanny was just the woman to heal all the wounds in his heart, and make the desert of his life blossom again with all the sweet roses of peace and love.

Just as I was leaving my office one night for home, a boy came in and inquired for me. I turned round, with my hat already on, and asked him his errand.

"Dr. Strong sent me, sir. I was to give this note into your own hands."

I took the piece of paper and read these words:

"DEAR SIR,—*Your friend Mr. Holland is very ill—it promises to be a severe case of small-pox. He feared that you would become alarmed at not having seen him for some time, and come to seek him. He begged me to bid you keep away from him, for he said he would rather die, even without seeing you, than that you should run the risk of your own life, and that of two others almost as dear to him as to you. He will be well nursed.*—

"CHARLES STRONG."

Dudley knelt beside her and put the flowers in her lap.

I went home with the note in my hand. Carrying it into the drawing-room, I read it to mother and Fanny. Then for the first time, I knew the secret of my cousin's heart. She did not faint. Weak-looking, delicate little creature as she was, there was a fibre of strength in her nature such as I had never dreamt of. I shall never see her face whiter when the coffin walls shut it in than it was at that moment. I can never describe that awful, ghastly pallor. Thrice she tried to speak before the words found utterance.

"Aunt Margaret, I want to go and take care of him; may I?"

"Child, do you think I could let you risk your life?"

"Life is not much, Auntie—my life. I have no one on earth to whom I am all the world—no such close, near tie, as would make it sinful for me to run great risks. Besides, I have been exposed before, since I was vaccinated, and I have really no fears. He is my friend; I cannot trust him to the care of a hired nurse. If he died, I should be haunted for ever by his voice crying for mercy, for comfort which there was none to give him. Permit me to go. Send me with your blessing if you can; but, with your consent or without it, go I must."

My mother put her kind arms round her and kissed her.

"Go to your room, darling," she said gently. "In a few moments I will tell you what you may do."

The poor child obeyed her. I think she was glad to be alone for a few moments. My mother looked at me, when she was gone, in blank consternation.

"I feared it," she said, "and now you can see it, too. Love will not go lightly with her. What can we do? I feel that we ought not to leave him alone. He has been too much like a son and brother in our household. If it were not for Fanny, I should go. If I could only persuade her to stay here and let me go in her stead!"

"I am the one to go," I said. "Dudley would do as much for me. He is my friend, and I will not fail him in his hour of need. But what if Fanny is resolute? I fear she will be. I never saw that look of steel in her eyes before."

"Then I should go, too. I could never trust her there alone; poor little stricken thing!"

It was Fanny, after all, who made all the arrangements. Her will, underneath her childish mask, was iron. She would take care of him—none but she. My mother was to remove, since she insisted on it, to the house, and superintend the domestics, who, in their panic, would need some recognised authority, but, unless the need were imminent, she was not to enter the sick-room. The same rule Fanny insisted, should apply to me. I was to spend my nights in the house, and to come there often during the day, but I was not to see Dudley unless he were given up to die, or her own strength failed her.

"It is my right," she said, with a look of solemn, heroic sweetness. "It is all that is left for me to do for him in this world, and I love him—I did not know it myself before—I love him so that to die for him, since I may not live for him, would be happiness."

She nursed him through that horrible illness, taking regular turns in her vigils with the nurse, a kind, willing, capable woman, whom Dr. Strong had provided. The doctor said that to the untiring care which watched over him he owed his life. Without it, he would have certainly succumbed.

As soon as it was safe to leave him—when his strength began to come back—Fanny came to my mother and me, as we sat together, with a look of immovable resolution in her face—a look which I had learnt to understand. She spoke in quiet, firm tones.

"He is better now, and I am going away. I cannot stay here now. I owe it to him, to myself, to you both, who have been so kind to me, to go away. Knowing what my heart holds for that man, I must never meet him again, now that he is able to do without me. He might, in time, say or feel something that would rest like a guilty burden on his soul for ever. I am not romantic. I have thought it all over, and this is my simple duty. I shall go back to Madame Chegary's, where I was at school. It was my home for three years, and Madame will gladly receive me again into her family."

We did not oppose her. Sad as the parting was for us, we knew that she was right. Oh, what measureless cause of thankfulness it was afterwards that she had been so noble through it all! The next day she went.

The first evening that Dudley was able to pass with us downstairs, he said:

"Dr. Strong says Miss Carpenter saved my life. Am I never to thank her? I was too ill to know what she was doing for me then."

My mother answered him. She never approved of mysteries which it was possible to avoid.

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"Fanny went away rather suddenly," she said. "She had indeed devoted herself to you, and she was in need of change. She is gone to Madame Chegary's. It was her old home, and she is going to spend a little while there again."

The next day two letters came to Dudley.

One was from the superintending physician of the asylum where his wife was.

He wrote as follows:

"Dear Sir,—*Having been made aware of the serious nature of your illness by your friends, I have refrained from writing to you, as I should otherwise have done, upon a subject of the deepest importance. The crisis to which I looked forward in Mrs. Holland's malady has arrived. Her bodily health is failing with fearful rapidity, but her mind is regaining its old clearness. She remembers the ties that bind her to you, and longs to see you. In order satisfactorily to account for your absence, it was necessary to inform her of your illness. She is impatient to go to you, and I should advise this step, as soon as you think it can be taken without fear of contagion for her, or risk to your own health. I inclose a letter from her.*"

Her letter I read afterwards, but I may not copy it here. It is too sacred. She could remember nothing since the moment she was pronounced his wife at the altar. Could it be, she asked him, that ten long, deadly, silent years had parted them since—years in which he must have felt her existence a burden instead of a blessing? And now they told her he was ill. *Might* she come to him? Had he any love left for her, after so much pain?

Oh, how full the letter was of passionate beseeching, of longing, overflowing love! It moved Dudley Holland's heart to the depths. Tears of thanksgiving rolled down his cheeks. He murmured an inaudible prayer. Then he cried, eagerly:

"Can you go for her, Ralph? Is it not safe? I must have her home—my Edith, my wife! Every hour she is not with me is so much wasted of what God sends to repay me for all these hopeless years. Perhaps she will live. If I can but save her alive—if I can but realise, after all this desolate blank, the old, fond dreams!"

My mother's eyes met mine. How thankful we both felt that Fanny was gone—poor Fanny! As usual, it was mother's clear judgment and kindly heart which came to our aid.

"Ralph shall go for her, to-morrow," she said, putting her soothing hand over his restless fingers. "This afternoon you shall be moved to our house. That will save her from any risk of infection. Besides, I must go home, and I want her where I can help you to nurse her; where I can have a little care of you both."

The plan relieved Dudley wonderfully. He said a little about the trouble it would be, and how wrong he was sure it was for him to consent; but his faint objections were overruled, and the plan was carried into execution.

The next morning I went for Edith. Singularly enough she recognised me and called me by name. Indeed, her recollection of everything up to the hour of her marriage was vivid and perfect. Beyond that she could not go.

She was evidently very feeble. She was in a state of extreme emaciation, and she could not walk without assistance, but her eyes were clear and her face serene. We took her in an easy-carriage, made almost like a bed with pillows and quilts. The superintending physician accompanied us, and helped me when we reached home to carry her upstairs. We laid her gently down in the room which was to be her own, and then sent Dudley in. I think neither of them could have borne any witness to their meeting, after all those bitter years of a living death.

When they had been together an hour he came out, his face radiant.

"She has dropped asleep now, doctor," he said to the waiting physician. "She was very tired. Will you go and look at her? She is better than I feared. It must be that there is hope. Love and happiness will restore her. She will be all to me that I ever dreamt."

I understood the look on the doctor's face. In his opinion there was no hope. For a few days, however, I was inclined to think with Dudley that she would yet recover. Under the spell of her happiness she seemed to revive so wonderfully. What is this man, I could not help asking myself as I watched them, that two women should love him with devotion so unutterable?

Her mind continued perfectly clear. She remembered all the days and hours of their love as vividly as did Dudley himself. She was profoundly happy.

At length she died. It was a summer sunset when she passed away—the eleventh anniversary of their marriage. They had been alone for several hours—hours full of sweet and tender communion, of such pledges as those make whose next meeting will be among the angels. At the very last it came suddenly. Raising herself in bed, she dropped her wasted arms round his neck and pressed her lips to his in a long, fervent kiss. "God bless you, my own!" she breathed, in a low, fond whisper; and then a faint, icy breath crossed his cheek—her last!

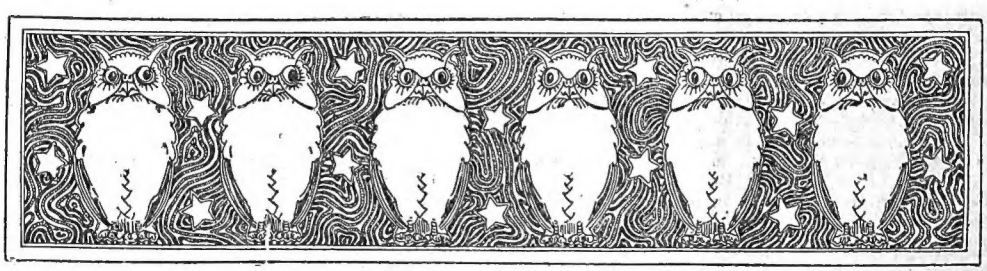
Dudley Holland mourned for her with a sorrow as deep as his love had been long and fervent. Yet, I know, he could think of her with a more resigned heart, at rest in the quiet land whither all our steps are tending, than he could in the years of her madness and misery.

She had been dead a year before he ever mentioned Fanny to me. Then, one day, he asked me, in direct words, if I thought she loved him. He had told Edith, he said, the whole story of their acquanitance, especially of the devotion with which she had nursed him through his terrible illness. Edith had read in it all the girl's heart; had begged him to marry her; had told him that she should be happier to know it, even in Heaven; to feel that his marriage with her had not blighted his whole life, condemned him to perpetual solitude. Did I think she was right?

I told him he must ask Fanny. It was all I could say. I had no right to betray her secret. The next day he went to town. When he came back he brought Fanny with him.

They are very happy. I do not think Dudley Holland does love, or can ever love, Fanny with the passion so fervent as that wild love of his youth, when he was willing to encounter all risks, however desperate, to cast the whole purpose and promise of his life at Edith Champney's feet. But she is very dear to him. She is his beloved as well as his honoured wife, and she is satisfied. I believe that to be allowed to care for his comfort, to minister to his happiness, is to her the crown and glory of life. May their days be long and their joys many!

Robert Harley.



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The Scheming of Basil Thornton.

Relating How a Will was Stolen and Recovered.

(Containing the incident depicted on the cover.)

Old Richard Mayne, the crusty bachelor who owned half Woodcote, lived frugally there in the country. A distant connection of his, Muriel James, a pretty girl of twenty, kept house for him.

She found it hard at times to put up with his temper and his overbearing manners.

Old Mayne had long decided that his wealth should go to one of his two nephews, Basil Thornton and Jack Summers.

About his money he had talked to them quite plainly. He would leave it, he told them, to the one who worked best, who showed that he would reach success, and be fit to have control of his wealth.

Basil Thornton was a shifty, underhanded man, in some business in the City. Very few people liked him. Jack Summers had passed his examinations for the Bar, and was now diligently sitting in chambers, still studying, moving Heaven and earth in his attempt to get briefs.

Jack was a handsome, popular fellow, and he was certain he would get on all right if he once got a start. He did not like his cousin Thornton, but Thornton simply hated him, because he was an obstacle.

Thornton, at the time when this story begins, seemed to be making a good deal of money. In an offhand way he would mention the amount of his income to friends, an amount at which they would be surprised, and congratulate him wonderingly.

While poor Summers was living as closely as he could possibly manage, going straight home to his lodgings every evening from his dingy chambers, Thornton's circumstances appeared to be such that he could afford to spend money royally.

Some of his friends whispered among themselves that he could not go on long in this way.

Muriel did not like Basil Thornton. He was cad enough to speak contemptuously of women even in a woman's presence, and, while he was not exactly rude to her during his visits to Woodcote, she thought his manner hateful.

By-the-way, Muriel thought that Jack Summers was one of the nicest fellows she had ever known.

But Basil Thornton flattered himself that he got on well with every woman whom he met. One day, after a very extravagant week (the contemplation of the expenses of which had given him a rueful face), he had a brilliant idea.

His debts were accumulating fast.

Now, Richard Mayne, his uncle, had always given it to be understood that his money would go either to Jack Summers or to himself.

But old men like Richard Mayne, who were in a position to please themselves without considering anybody, often changed their minds. What about that little girl who kept house for him—only a distant relation, it was true, but still old Mayne might change his mind in her favour.

Basil Thornton crossed the room, and looked at himself in the glass for a long time. When Basil thought of himself, which was fairly often, he always imagined that he had a striking face.

It may have been striking. It was certainly not a handsome face.

Muriel James was rather a decent little girl, too, reflected Basil. Of course, she was by no means up to his style, but, then, think of the risk that he removed by marrying her. It would be a perfectly brilliant stroke. She would jump at him, said Basil to himself. Why, perhaps old Mayne would set them up at once. His bills were becoming a nuisance.

Having settled all this in his mind, Basil Thornton spent more money than ever on the strength of these rose-coloured thoughts. Then one summer's morning he went down to Woodcote.

Richard Mayne, his uncle, had gone out in the dogcart to the village on some business in connection with his property, which was widely scattered.

He found Muriel alone.

"Good-morning, Miss James," he said. She returned his greeting coldly.

"Will my uncle be long, do you think?"

"I don't expect so. I'll tell him you are here directly he comes in." Her hand was on the door, but Basil said, "Don't go, Miss James. I'm not such an ogre as all that, am I? Besides, I want a talk with you."

Wondering, she came back into the room. She was prettier than he had thought, saidBasil to himself. The next moment he had started the business of his errand with more earnestness than he had intended. In other words, he had tried to kiss her. But he started back, a stinging blow across his face.

"How dare you touch me, Mr. Thornton!" she cried.

"I want you to marry me," said Basil feebly, recovering his self-satisfaction a little.

Muriel's laugh sent the angry blood to his face again, and he flew into a violent temper. "I would never think of marrying a man like you."

"I know what it is." Basil Thornton almost screamed the words. "That conceited cousin of mine has been down here."

"I won't hear a word against Mr. Summers," said Muriel with quiet dignity.

"You will!" said Basil Thornton. Chancing to turn his head slightly, he had caught sight of old Richard Mayne, standing grim and sardonic in the doorway, watching the development of the high words that had drawn him up the stairs.

It was a fine chance to run his hated cousin down, to injure him with his uncle. Richard Mayne did not know that Basil had noticed him.

"If you knew the way he has been going on in London," said Basil. "He does no work from the beginning of the week to the end."

"It's not true," said Muriel, bravely defending him.

"It is true, though. He never will get any briefs. He just lazes through day after day. I tell you he's just hanging on the chance of—well, you know what chance."

"I don't believe it!" said Muriel. "Jack—Mr. Summers, works very hard."

"Good-morning, Basil," said old Mayne's grim voice from the doorway.

Muriel started, but Basil turned easily. "Good morning,

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sir," said he, as if he had just seen his uncle there for the first time.

Basil Thornton went away that evening from Woodcote on good terms with himself. By means of a lot of figures he had made his uncle think that his business was prospering greatly, and that he, Basil, had been working so hard and attentively at it that success in his business was certain. And he had persuaded old Mayne that Jack Summers was an idle fellow, good for nothing.

In fact, Richard Mayne had almost definitely decided to leave his money to Basil Thornton.

The next day, indeed, old Mayne drew up his will, which, with the exception of providing for Muriel, left everything to Basil Thornton.

Muriel was very unhappy, and tried repeatedly to change the determination of Richard Mayne.

"It's not true about Mr. Summers," she told him.

But Richard Mayne shook his old head.

"I don't know, my dear. But his cousin has worked up a business, and he tells me it's paying well. He's the man for me."

Muriel begged a few days of her uncle, and went to stay with some friends in London. In that time she learnt a good many things concerning Basil Thornton. But in spite of her sympathy with Jack Summers, she did not wish to be underhanded, and she said nothing to her uncle when she returned.

Soon afterwards old Mayne became seriously ill, and both his nephews came down to Woodcote. And Basil Thornton came to her smiling with triumph, and said scornfully: "I win the game, Miss Muriel."

Both the cousins stayed at Woodcote till their uncle was well enough to get up and be about. In the same room where he had offered her marriage that morning Basil Thornton said good-bye to Muriel. And now he honestly desired to marry her, and asked her for the second time. When she again refused, he became very angry.

"I gave you your answer then," replied Muriel. "I give you the same answer now. I shall never alter my mind about you. I have learnt all about you—I know you are a liar and a scoundrel!"

"What do you mean?" shouted Basil.

"You have poisoned Mr. Mayne's mind against your cousin; you have lied to him about your prosperity. You know that has all been lies—I have found out. You know that you are really in debt, and borrowing money on the strength of being Mr. Mayne's heir——"

"*Is this true?*" Once again old Mayne stood in the doorway, leaning against the side, weak from his illness. His voice was strong as ever. "Is this true, Basil?" he thundered.

Unable to equivocate in face of his uncle's stern look, Basil nodded sullenly. "Ah," said old Mayne. The excitement was too much for him, and he fell to the ground. Muriel rushed to his side.

"You have ruined me!" hissed Basil Thornton, and rushed from the room.

That night it was known that the master of Woodcote would not live. But, near to death as he was, and learning the truth about Basil, and how unfairly he had treated Jack Summers, he drew up another will in the latter's favour, of which only Muriel and another witness knew.

And Basil Thornton looked up at the shuttered room of death, and knew that he was ruined. Alone in her room, Muriel watched, dressed and sleepless, for the dawn.

There was a desperate chance for Basil. He guessed why old Mayne had sent for Muriel before he died.

If he could get into the dead man's room and steal that roughly drawn up will, the former one, the one in his favour, would stand!

There would be no chance of his disputing the hurriedly drawn will because there had not been time to send for a lawyer. Richard Mayne was too sharp and keen, even though death was at hand, to leave any loophole for mistake in his purpose.

He crept through the cold, unfriendly corridors, noiseless as a cat. It was long after midnight, and the dawn was not far off. A creaking stair terrified him; the silent room where the dead man lay, and which he reached at last, was greater terror still. He shaded the match so that he could not see the grim, silent figure on the bed. Once he could not help but see it, and then he fancied that the dead face was laughing at him.

He staggered back, and in that moment he saw the will on a little table by the dead man's side. It had been made out on ordinary large paper, and it was tied with red ribbon.

He groped for it with guilty hand; the match burnt his fingers as he stooped.

It was light when he retraced his trembling steps. He would go away at once and hide it in a safe place, then return as if nothing had happened. But his fumbling with the bolts of the door of the house reached the ears of Muriel James, who was watching, silent and sleepless, through the hours of the night.

She went to the window in time to see Basil just getting clear of the house. He had no hat, and she could just see there was something in his hand. What did it mean?

Bareheaded, too, she slipped quickly after him, and out into the keen morning air. The dew of the morning soaked through her thin shoes, she was tired with her sleeplessness; but a feeling that something was wrong, and that she must get to the bottom of it, kept her sharp and strong.

She was, in fact, gaining on him when he looked back over his shoulder and saw her. He began to run, and she ran too, gaining on him still more.

Looking back again, Basil Thornton saw how close she was. They passed a high wall, a dog within barked loudly at the sound of their steps; in desperation Thornton flung the thing in his hand high to the right over the wall. She would never be able to get it there, and he could come back afterwards for it. He could soon out-distance her, surely.

But Muriel did not attempt to follow him. She had seen the touch of red in the thing he had thrown over, and she had noticed as she flew past a little iron gate set in the bottom of the wall.

She went back. To her joy she found the little gate yield to her touch. It clanged as she shut it behind her. Immediately she was assailed and terrified by a ferocious barking the moment that she recognised that the thing which Basil Thornton had thrown over the wall was the will of old Richard Mayne, the will that she had witnessed, leaving the property to Jack Summers.

It had fallen away from the wall. And to a staple in the wall a chain was fastened, and at the end of the chain an enormous bloodhound danced and pawed in rage at sight of her. The will was under his very paws. Oh, Heavens, if the dog should seize it and destroy it!

She was afraid to reach it, for the dog was so threatening.

Yet she must dare. With a new idea she flung a stone against the wall, and, as the dog swerved towards the sound, she made a dash for the precious packet. But the bloodhound's distraction was only for half a second; he swung back again, growling horribly. She fled out of his reach, screaming and more afraid than before.

Ah, why could she not be brave? She *would* get that packet and prevent it from being destroyed, at any risk or injury.

She went forward and bent resolutely down. The hot breath of the bloodhound was upon her; his claws drew blood from her face and twisted in her hair, giving her a pain not to be borne. She shut her eyes and groped blindly for the packet; she felt the touch of it with a little cry of thankfulness.

The next minute she had rolled away. The blood was streaming from her deathly face, and she had fainted.

* * * * * * *

It was Jack Summers, her lover, who found her there not long after. She was clasping tightly the red-ribboned packet that meant so much and might so easily have been destroyed.

It was after all a happy couple who went back hand in hand through the morning to the house of death.

And Basil Thornton, the schemer, never saw either again.

Warwick Wright.

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AN UNSUSPECTED MATCHMAKER.

The Story of an Unfounded Rumour.

"THAT silly rumour spoilt the whole thing, Jean!" said Roy Dennison dejectedly to his sister. "You want to know why I'm suffering so acutely from the blues, and I'm making a full confession!"

"This is interesting!" observed Jean Dennison, surveying her brother critically. "When, a fortnight ago, the rumour got abroad that you and Kitty Bryne were engaged, the idea appeared to me to be so utterly absurd that I laughed till I cried!

"I knew that you and Miss Bryne had never exchanged more than a couple of dozen words, which made the rumour impossible, quite apart from the fact that you have been the most invulnerable of men! In fact, Roy, to speak to you in a frank and sisterly manner——"

"As you generally take good care to do!" he interrupted drily.

"Don't be so pointed!" she remonstrated with a frown. "But it does you good to be told the truth, Roy! Well, to finish my remarks, you have been quite a thorn in my side; for all the girls I meet wish to know why you are not more amiable to their sex!"

"Oh, come!" objected Roy with animation. "I have always been polite to ladies; I am neither a bear nor a bore!"

"No, it isn't that!" explained Jean somewhat awkwardly. "But you have never shown any disposition to—to——. Oh, dear! How dense you are, Roy! Don't you understand?"

"I cannot say that your explanation is a very lucid one," remarked Roy with a slight flush, "but I suppose you mean that I have never shown any disposition to select one as a life-partner. I have never attempted to make love to anyone, eh?"

"That's it!" cried Jean quickly. "Well," she added, with a curious twinkle in her merry brown eyes, "now you tell me plump and plain that you had fallen in love with Kitty Bryne, and you were just about to make some advance when that rumour of an engagement was spread concerning you two—and that spoilt your life. Well, it *was* awkward, because she may think that you circulated the rumour as a move to further your conquest!"

"That's just what she must think," cried Roy dismally. "She cut me dead the very next time we passed in the street! I did my best to contradict it, but even the contradiction is hurtful, because it has the air of saying, 'I don't want her, and I'm indignant at the idea'! See, Jean? It has made my case simply hopeless!"

"It *is* awkward!" admitted Jean with puckered brows. "But I think if I had been you, and in love with the girl, I should have gone to her boldly and explained that the affair was a hoax, told her that you were in love with her, and asked her if she had any objection to transforming the rumour into actual truth."

"What!" gasped her less excitable and energetic brother. "Why, that would have convinced her that I had done it on purpose! Besides, I wasn't sure that I really loved her enough to make her my wife, and it isn't right to jump into matrimony. However, since she cut me, nearly a fortnight ago, I have come solidly to the conviction that I am in love and that my life without her will be a blank!"

"H'm!" said Jean, the mischievous twinkle becoming more mischievous, "and now you wish me to help you to undo the mischief wrought by the unknown rumourist—I think that that's rather a good word, don't you? That means that you want me to assist in bringing Kitty Bryne and you together?

"Seriously, Roy," she went on with pretended gravity, "I scarcely feel justified in doing so till I am quite satisfied that you are really in love. I have no proper proof of that fact yet!"

Roy looked up in alarm at the prospect of losing his lively sister's aid; her attitude was unexpected.

"I am in deadly earnest, Jean!" he cried passionately. "I love that girl to desperation; I have felt my love increasing day by day, I could worship the ground she walks on, and it is maddening to me to see her pass; I long to take her in my arms and tell her how madly I adore her, and yet I must not even meet her lovely eyes!

"What will life be without her? What will be the value of position, distinction, honours, if I cannot lay them at her feet? My whole being is hers, and the thought that another may possess her is intolerable! I yearn for her!"

"You've improved wonderfully!" said Jean calmly. "Jack never talks to me like that, and the very next time he comes I shall want to know why. When we were first engaged he did say something about his heart, but it was tame compared with you! I'll tell him to have a chat with you and take lessons, or I'll give him back his ring. I don't see why I shouldn't be treated as well as any other girl!"

Roy rose and stared haughtily at his irrepressible sister.

"This is not a joke, Jean!" he said stiffly. "I don't want Jack to ask me questions and if it won't help me——"

A ripple of laughter interrupted him. Jean sprang up, clasped her big brother round the neck, and kissed him.

"You're a goose, Roy! You know, dear, that you have been so invulnerable, so impregnable to the darts of Cupid, that to hear you talk like that is quite startling, and you deserved to be chaffed about it a little! You forget that you chaffed me when my engagement was announced, don't you? That's always the way with you cold, unimpressionable sort of men, when you *do* get caught in the toils, you—— But I won't tease you, Roy; I'll help you and, if you'll do your part, I will undertake that Kitty shall give you a kiss like this one day!"

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She kissed him again with additional fervour. "Oh, you needn't blush so furiously! It will be very nice, I'm sure!"

Before the confused Roy could speak she had seated herself on the couch and begun to reflect.

"How can it be managed?" asked Roy at length.

"I'm thinking!" responded Jean.

There was no mistake about the thinking, if her appearance could be taken as a guide; for her brows were knit, her lips set tightly, and her eyes became grave and had a far-away expression.

"I shall have to press Jack into it," she said at length, "and I'm pretty confident of success. Listen, and I'll tell you my plan."

He listened, his face betraying doubt and perplexity, mingled with a trace of expectancy.

"But don't you think that she will——" he began, but Jean stopped him.

"Not at all, afterwards," she declared. "Why should she, if she is married and happy? It only paves the way and leads up to the point where you come in and do the rest!"

"Very well," he agreed. "Oh, you need not fear that I shall not have the courage to go on, if I get the chance. I love her so dearly; she is the——"

Jean's rippling laughter rang out again and she vanished through the doorway as he took up a book and made pretence of being about to throw it at her.

"That girl plagues the life out of me, but I will forgive her if she will put things right!" he murmured.

"It's all right so far," announced Jean on the following day to her expectant brother. "Jack and her brother are good friends, and Jack has so worked on the brother that he has partly wheedled and partly chaffed and partly dared her going to Madame Navarro's to have her fortune told. Kitty has a keen scorn of all that kind of thing, so the best way to get at her was to insinuate that she was afraid to learn what was in store for her, and that finished it. She has plenty of pluck and she is going, just to show that he is wrong."

"What a shame!" cried Roy with a feeling of compunction. "And Madame Navarro?"

"Jack says that you owe him a guinea for services rendered, but you need not send it by return of post as he is not hard up," said Jean enigmatically.

"I understand! It's worth a guinea if Madame does her work."

"She demurred at first, and said it might spoil her reputation, but Jack told her that it was quite likely to come true, whether the oracle said so or not, so she ought to have no fear for her renown."

"Jack and you will make a good pair of schemers!" was Roy's smiling comment on this speech, whereat Jean laughed happily.

That very evening the object of this conspiracy, Miss Kitty Bryne, went to the house of Madame Navarro to consult the oracle. She was tall and pretty; stately, and with an air of determination, but her stateliness and her determined air were not so pronounced as to prevent her from looking most winning.

It was rather a cold evening, and the sharpness of the air, coupled with the inward expectancy, produced a tinge of colour on her cheeks sufficient to enhance her attractiveness in a way that would have made it difficult for Roy to have restrained himself had he seen her at that moment.

Madame Navarro had had no notice from Kitty that she intended to call, but she found the feminine seer at home, and she required no introduction.

"Pray be seated, Miss Bryne," she requested, much to Kitty's surprise. Then she produced the cards and began.

Various things were told, and Kitty listened languidly till Madame asked, after making a fresh shuffle and laying half a dozen cards on the table. "Do you know anyone whose name begins with 'R'?"

Kitty reflected and finally returned a decided negative, a look of unbelieving triumph in her eyes.

"Strange," murmured Madame slowly. "Yet the cards plainly indicate such a person, who will be to you as one who brings good fortune. He or she will be your mascot! Let us go on!"

Madame continued her divinations. The cards showed evidence of an engagement, either just consummated or soon to be. Was Kitty already engaged? No? Then the saying of the cards was a prediction.

"You will soon meet someone to whom you will ultimately be engaged," Madame assured her. Kitty shrugged her shoulders slightly, whereon Madame continued: "It will come, and you will be foolish to repel the feeling through pride, believe me!" This was said so earnestly that Kitty was impressed.

After the cards, Madame did a little palmistry; she invariably gave her consultants the benefit of three sources of inspiration, the cards, the hands, and the magic mirror.

In Kitty's hands there were the same indications of an early engagement, a happy married future, and so forth, but this time the additional information was vouched that the future husband was a man who had not hitherto shown himself very impressionable.

Then came the mirror. Kitty had to place her hand on it for one minute, after which Madame wiped the surface carefully and gazed at it with much earnestness. It was necessary for the consultant to place her hand on the glass in order to have the magic effect of predicting the consultant's future, otherwise there was no conception between her and the glass, and there would be no pictures.

Madame saw several picutres; but it is unnecessary to mention those which do not deal with this story; it is sufficient to say that, as in the case of the cards and palmistry, there was just enough that was true to cause Kitty to feel that there must be something in these things which were of the future. Madame saw a young woman passing a man; the woman she recognised as Kitty, the man she did not know. She had certainly never seen him. The young man appeared to think, from his expression, that he had been unjustly treated. Kitty's face grew warm.

Another picture represented Kitty and this same young man; Madame could see him better now, and she gave a description which Kitty recognised as that of Mr. Dennison. The two were talking amiably and he appeared to be very attentive; Kitty seemed to be pleased. Another picture represented the same pair standing and apparently receiving congratulations. Madame said that the picture became blurred after a moment and she was unable to say whether the couple were dressed as if for a wedding or merely in ordinary clothes.

"Ah, I can see no more pictures; the mirror will tell me no more to-day!" cried Madame regretfully.

Kitty was satisfied. She placed the usual amount of silver thanks on the table and rose to say good evening. As if impelled by a sudden thought, Madame remarked. "Perhaps his name begins with 'R'? I can assure you that there is something in that statement of the cards!

Kitty shook her head slowly and left. She was disturbed by the consultation. She might have been more disturbed if she could have seen Jean retailing the interview to Roy; it was third-hand, having come through Jack.

"Jack's people are giving a party in a week; they have invited Kitty's brother and, as he (poor fellow!) is not engaged, he will persuade his sister to come. You are invited, Roy, so there's the first chance; make use of it!" said Jean.

Roy looked forward eagerly to that night, and when the evening arrived and he was in the house of the Masons, he looked just as eagerly for Kitty.

He soon espied her, and, nerving himself for an effort, he approached her and took a seat by her side.

They had been introduced weeks previously, but that cut in the street undid all that had preceded, or would have done in ordinary circumstances. But Roy screwed up his courage and ignored that disagreeable fact.

"I think this will be a decidedly pleasant evening, Miss Bryne, don't you? The Masons are good entertainers."

Thus deliberately addressed, she felt bound to answer politely. She wished he had not taken that seat; and then the

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recollection of that picture in the magic mirror came to her. Perhaps, after all, she had really been unjust in cutting him. She looked at him from the corner of her eye, and decided that she had. Having arrived at that conclusion, Kitty felt bound to make amends, and, although she could not see her way to make a plain apology yet, still she could efface the sting of the slight by being gracious now!

The result was that they were soon chatting quite pleasantly, and Roy was so happy that he trembled with joy. Kitty occasionally thought of the suggested engagement so persistently mentioned by Madame, and it chilled her for the moment, but she dismissed it and continued her process of making amends for her past rudeness.

"It doesn't follow that I am to marry a man because I talk to him," she told herself. "Mr. Roy Dennison was—— Oh, that 'R'!"

Now, however much we may disown it, there is a stratum of superstition in the breasts of all human creatures, and Kitty Bryne, usually strong-minded, had quite an ordinary mortal's share of it.

We all long to know something of the future, and, when we are told of something that is supposed to be in store for us, we endeavour to realise that something, unless it be extraordinarily disagreeable. This endeavour may even be unconscious, strange as that may appear.

Jean was shrewd enough to know this fact, and she had determined to use it for all it was worth; hence the visit to Madame Navarro, and now the effect was becoming tangible.

Kitty was simultaneously repelled and attracted by the fact that Roy Dennison and she were to be thrown together. She did not at first relish the idea, and yet—yet Roy was a grand specimen of a man, and she had heard a good repute of him! Roy played his part well, and before the evening was over, it was practically arranged that Jack Mason, with Mr. and Miss Dennison, should come to the Brynes' party a week later.

That week seemed more like a year to Roy, and by the time it had passed away he was in such a fever of excitement that he made a false move. He schemed for a few moments' conversation with Kitty and succeeded; but he boldly began to talk about the rumoured engagement.

"Suppose that rumour had been correct, Miss Bryne," he commenced, "we should have been thinking about the wedding by now, I imagine?"

Kitty flushed, and then she looked angry.

"I do not think we need discuss that piece of stupidity, Mr. Dennison!" she remarked coldly. "It was vexing to me!"

Roy saw his mistake; Jean's notion of a bold attack had not been rewarded with the desired result. Perhaps the conditions were different now that so long a time had passed! Roy, in his anxiety not to spoil his chance this time, developed unexpected coolness and artfulness.

"I can cordially echo your sentiments, Miss Bryne!" he declared with assumed sincerity. "It was most vexing to me to have my name linked in such an unwarrantable fashion with that of a young lady whom I scarcely knew."

Kitty did not like that speech; it was practically telling her that she had not attracted his attention in the least—she, whom so many young men had courted, or tried to court, in vain! She set her lips firmly, but Roy gave her no time.

"Yet," he continued musingly, "you really thought that *I* set that rumour afloat, I do believe! Now, I wonder why on earth you should have thought that?"

Kitty felt ready to cry; it was not often that her feelings got the better of her, but she was conscious of her unjustified rudeness, and she was being informed in plain, matter-of-fact language that she had no grounds for having harboured the idea! It was rather humiliating for such a favourite as Kitty Bryne!

Their little chat was interrupted and it was an hour later before they met again. It occurred to Roy that Kitty had watched for an opportunity for this second chat, and he was right; Kitty's vanity was wounded and she had resolved to show this cool young fellow, who had almost boasted of his immunity, that he was not impregnable.

"I was thinking just now of your remark," she said, boldly plunging into the difficult subject. "Suppose that announcement had been true?"

"Well?" he inquired.

He was looking straight into her eyes with a glance that seemed to read her soul. She was nonplussed; she had expected him to take up the thread, and there he was, leaving her to go on! And he was gazing at her in such a disconcerting manner! Poor Kitty, despite her usual self-possession, found her heart beating violently.

"Well, suppose?" she continued lamely, "I——"

She was so vexed with herself for having started the foolish topic. It was so silly of her to collapse in that way, yet how could she go on when he gazed at her like that, when her own heart was beating so hurriedly, and when he left it all to her to say?

Roy saw the position and risked a bold move this time; he had failed before in the bold attack, but he forgot it. He simply could not help it; he was impelled by some unknown force.

"I am quite ready to suppose that it is true, Miss Bryne—Kitty! Are you?"

She sprang to her feet, her lips trembling, and would have hurried away, but he quickly strode to her side and guided her to a quiet corner, which was in reality a small room thrown into the larger one for the occasion.

"Well, Kitty, I am waiting for the answer!" he said softly, when they were secluded from all observers. "Can I have it? I did not circulate that rumour, but I was at that time just awakening to a knowledge of the fact that I was falling in love with you, and I wished that it were true! I was playing a game this evening when I said I was vexed; I said so because you treated me so coldly and I thought that it would make you reflect. Do you wish me to tell you how much I love you before you give me the answer?"

Apparently she did, for he told her, and he took some time about it, and she appeared to be well pleased with what he said. And before they left that nook, he had asked for and obtained the first kiss. As their lips parted, he remembered the words of Jean—"I am sure it will be very nice!" And he acknowledged that it was!

"Oh, I'm so glad!" was Jean's exclamation when she heard the great news. "How will you tell her about the fortune-telling?" she added, in response to her brother's perplexed inquiry. "Well, I'll settle that, Roy. As soon as the engagement is announced—or shall I say as soon as the announcement made some time ago is confirmed?—I shall have something to say!"

So she did. Roy and Kitty were sitting together when Jean entered.

"I must apologise for intruding," she observed lightly, "You don't like it, of course; *I* don't, when I am listening to Jack! But I have a confession to make!"

Roy felt hot, Kitty looked mystified; but neither knew exactly what was coming.

"I always thought that you two would make a very happy couple," she went on volubly, "so I thought I would turn matchmaker and engineer a marriage. So I circulated that rumour! Don't look so surprised both of you! Unfortunately it failed. I was not much disturbed till I discovered, a fortnight afterwards, how my brother was affected by it, and then I went further!" Here she told about the fortune-telling.

"Now, Kitty, I'm sure you'll be all forgiveness, because you are *so* happy, aren't you? Yes, I thought you would!" she rattled on. "Don't you think we might make a double event of it, Kitty? Jack says he can't, positively can't, wait more than another six weeks, and I'm sure that Roy will agree if you will, dear! Won't you, Roy?"

Of course, he replied in the affirmative, so Kitty, with flaming cheeks, gave her consent also.

Neva Grant.

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A Fragment - - of Wood.

Which Played a Prominent Part in Two Lovers' Lives.

In a tiny room of a miserable house in a wretched East End street, before the dying embers of a fire which had never been higher than the grate's second bar, sat a tall, thin youth of about nineteen. His chin was resting on his delicate, taper-like fingers, his big, dreamy eyes stared vacantly into space. A sheet of music was propped up in front of him, and a violin and bow lay on a clothless table.

There was the sound of much creaking as someone dashed precipitately up the rickety stairs, followed a moment later by a tap on the door. There was a second tap, to which was vouchsafed no answer. Then the door suddenly flew inwards, and a young girl, whose cheap, poor garments could not disguise her beautiful features, her flaxen hair, or the glory of her lustrous eyes, stood on the threshold. She stepped into the room and placed a brown-paper parcel on the table.

"Mr. Raymond," she said hesitatingly, "an old gentleman's just left this for you. He was all of a tremble, and said I was to carry it very carefully. And here's a letter."

"Oh, Marjorie, is that you?" The tall youth rose languidly. "I was just dreaming, Marjorie, that I was in a crowded theatre conducting an opera, which I had composed myself, and that you, dressed as you should be in lovely silk clothes, were smiling at me from a private box. But I say, Marjorie, won't you ever call me simply Raymond?"

The girl's face flushed with evident pleasure, but she replied never a word.

Raymond Wynne, "the young Paganini," as he was billed by the promoters of the public-house smoking concerts at which he earned a scanty livelihood, tore open the letter.

"My Dear Nephew," he read. "*I haven't got long to live. I am an old man, and my fingers are stiff with the rheumatics, so that I can't play my old fiddle as I used to. But you are a musician, you love a good fiddle like I do, and so I leave you my greatest treasure.*"

The young man clapped his hands with delight.

"Oh, Marjorie," he cried ecstatically, "my fortune's made. It's a real Strad."

With frantic haste the eager hands of the girl, and the more eager ones still of the young man, stripped the paper from the case. Then Raymond's manner suddenly changed.

"Don't touch it," he almost screamed. "It's mine—mine. Nobody must touch it but me."

He lifted the valuable instrument from its plush-lined bed, and caressed and hugged it. Then he tuned it, and, in a few moments, the miserable garret was flooded with delicious melody.

All this time the girl stood in the doorway gazing with rapturous eyes at her lover.

"I must go down now," she said, as the violinist paused for a moment; "mother is calling me."

The young man made no sign of having heard her words. His mind was completely taken up with his new possession.

It was past midnight before he laid down his bow. But he was up again at break of day—practising, continually practising. And so for days and weeks, no matter whether the other lodgers in the house grumbled or even threatened, he continued practising upon his beloved instrument.

No more did he sit in the long evenings with Marjorie and her half-blind mother, reading to them, playing to them, or inventing other amusements. No more did he take Marjorie for those delightful Saturday afternoon rambles, for which she dressed with such scrupulous care in all her finery, and to which she looked forward so longingly all the week.

And, Marjorie? How she hated the instrument that had robbed her of her lover. When she remonstrated, somewhat feebly, with Raymond, he was vexed with her for noticing such silly trifles. But he grew cool and preoccupied, and never talked of anything but his ambition, and the great name that awaited him, when once he could get a start. And the more her lover drifted away from her, the more Marjorie hated the instrument with all the strength of her passionate, untrained soul.

At last the chance came. By this time Raymond had secured a place in the orchestra of a London theatre. One day he bounded up the stairs, three at a time, of the miserable house, and burst into Marjorie's room.

"It's come, Marjorie, it's come," he shouted, throwing his cap to the ceiling. "My fortune's made, my dream's realised."

The girl stared at him.

"This morning," he went on excitedly, "the great Max Baumer was in the theatre—at the rehearsal. He heard me play my solo in the orchestra, and he clapped his hands and told the manager he had discovered a genius. And I'm to make my *début* to-night at one of his concerts. A performer has fallen ill. I am to take his place. If I am well received, my name is made. To-morrow I leave these rooms for better ones. See, Baumer has given me a cheque."

He kissed Marjorie carelessly, and tore away to his room to caress his magic instrument, and to draw from it the ecstatic strains of pure delight.

He never noticed that Marjorie didn't return his kiss, or that while he spoke she walked away from him to the window with white cheeks and clenched, trembling hands.

Late in the afternoon, he hurried out to purchase a ready-made suit of evening clothes for the concert.

Raymond had not left the house more than half-an-hour

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when the door—which in his excitement he had forgotten to lock—was pushed gently back and Marjorie tiptoed softly into his room.

But the figure which crept in so stealthily was very unlike the pretty young seamstress. Her face was whiter than ever, her lips were compressed tightly, and there was an evil light in the deep blue eyes.

Without pausing a moment she went straight up to the case inclosing the object of her hatred. With a shaking hand she threw open the case.

"It's you!" she cried, and her sweet voice had an angry snarl, "you who have stolen him from me! You have driven him mad, and now you are going to take him away. And, I—oh, Heavens, how I love him!"

She stamped a small foot sharply on the floor. Her eyes seemed ablaze. Then suddenly she seized the Stradivarius by its neck, dragged it from its case, snatched a knife from the table, and in a moment the strings were cut by a furious stroke. Though her body rocked with the passion that consumed her, she did not pause. Raising the violin high above her head she brought it down again and again with a sickening crash on the bars of the iron grate.

In two minutes the valuable instrument was a hideous, splintered wreck—almost past recognition—at the feet of Marjorie, who stood panting, but beginning to slowly realise what she had done.

The sound of a man's light-hearted whistling as he hurried up the stairs caused her to turn to the door—to encounter the eyes of Raymond Wynne. His face was glowing with happiness, and he carried a bulging parcel.

Throwing down the parcel, he began to incircle the girl's waist with his arm.

"Why, Marjorie, dear, you——" He stopped suddenly. His eyes caught sight of the mangled remains. In a flash he understood. His face turned livid, his breath came in quick gasps.

But as suddenly as his passion had risen, so Marjorie's had died completely away, and she now stood terrified and pleading.

"Raymond," she sobbed, clutching at his arm. "Oh, Raymond, forgive me! It was my love for you. Think——"

Like an angry tiger he turned upon her, mad and blind with rage.

"Murderess," he called her again and again. Then, raising his arm, he struck her twice with his clenched fist across the brow. She fell like a log—a thin stream of blood spurting from her temple. Raymond looked at her a moment, a gleam of savage exultation lighting his face, and then, without a word, he rushed blindly down the stairs and out of the house.

For two days and two nights Raymond Wynne wandered about, fighting with many sensations. At last his mood softened—an agony of penitence came upon him, and he returned to his old room. He meant to ask Marjorie's forgiveness.

But Marjorie and her mother had gone, no one knew whither.

On the table of his room he found a note from Max Baumer. He had come in search of Raymond when he failed to keep his engagement, and seeing the remains—which still lay by the hearth—had guessed pretty correctly what had occurred; being as kind as he was great, he offered to lend his own instrument to Raymond if he would consent to play for him the following week.

* * * * *

Twenty years have passed away. The ambitious, unknown lad has developed into a great composer and musician, whose name is a household word. Poverty has given way to wealth, obscurity to fame, and yet he is not satisfied.

The ormolu clock on the mantelpiece of the superbly-furnished drawing-room has chimed the hour of eleven, yet Raymond Wynne, though looking pale and weary, shows no sign of retiring for the night.

There seemed no reason on this particular evening why he should sip coffee and blow smoke rings into the small hours.

He had scrawled the final chord of his new opera early in the afternoon, and though, as a matter of course, he was neck-deep in engagements, he had decided, with the easy unconcern of the popular idol, to disregard them all. Truth to tell, it had suddenly drifted into the cells of his over-stocked mind that the 23rd of June was an anniversary, and he intended to keep it up his own particular way.

It seemed strange to him that he should have remembered it. Usually such matters made no impression upon him, and his wife was wont regularly to prod his memory when conventionality demanded that he should appear interested in such events as their wedding day or her birthday.

He thought of his wife, and he sank back languidly into his chair—thought with calm complacency how exactly she suited him.

This evening she was out—shining somewhere in their brilliant circle with some of the reflected radiance of his fame.

She had been a wealthy widow when he married her, and a famous beauty into the bargain, and that of itself is a sufficiently alluring candle for the average Society moth. As for love—well, there had never been any pretence of that between them. They had both been too old when they met for anything so—so hysterical.

But then Vera wasn't that kind of woman at all. Society called her the "Iceberg," and the musician smiled. He rather liked the name—it pleased his self-esteem. He was quite aware that she had simply chosen him because a celebrity is a good investment when pride is the capital.

Even after three years of married life he knew very little of her, he reflected. He hadn't troubled to know much. Vera wasn't given to confidences, and this was just as well, because confidences would have been rather a nuisance to a busy man.

Her beauty pleased him; her social triumphs were put to the fire of his ambition; her discretion was beyond challenge; and what more did he want?

"Ah, what more?" He repeated the words aloud, and then rising abruptly, he walked across the room to a cabinet, unlocked it, took something from it, and reseated himself.

It was no romantic relic that he held in his hand; neither a tendril of hair nor a faded flower; not even a packet of letters. It was merely a small, thin piece of polished wood. Like a flood the incidents of that miserable evening, twenty years before, rushed back to his memory.

He glanced round the luxurious room and thought of the miserable garret he once rented in that wretched East End street; he looked from the corner where, by a grand piano, were heaped several of the costliest violins money could buy, to the scrap of wood in his hand, the sole remains of his first Stradivarius.

Then his eyes sought the stately features of his wife in the full length portrait painted by a celebrated Royal Academician, and another picture rose out of the mist before his eyes—the picture of a girl in lowly dress with a soft tenderness in her deep blue eyes, who pleaded with him for forgiveness—the picture of Marjorie.

* * * * *

His head was still buried in his breast when his wife came into the room.

"Still up?" she asked, slightly elevating her handsome eyebrows. "Isn't it a little late—even for you?"

The composer started, and passed his hand across his fevered forehead as if trying to collect himself.

"I suppose it is," he said "but, strange to say, Vera, I've been thinking."

She shrugged her faultless shoulders.

"Gracious me!" she said. "One shouldn't think. If I thought—why, good Heavens, I should have wrinkles and furrows and grey hairs in a fortnight!"

He looked up quickly. Despite the carelessness of her tone, there was a note in it he did not quite understand.

"What's that?" she asked suddenly, pointing to the scrap of wood which still lay on the table.

He picked it up again and fingered it tenderly.

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"It's a piece of a violin—one of the first violins I ever had. It's been reminding me of something which happened on this very day, twenty years ago. I—I should like, if you'd let me, Vera, to tell you about it."

He marvelled then, as he often marvelled afterwards, at the sudden impulse which impelled him to speak to her. But his heart was too full, and the desire to unburden it to someone was too strong to be resisted.

Without waiting for her to answer he began. He talked quickly—half-afraid that she would interrupt him with some chilling piece of sarcasm or some politely incredulous inquiry.

He spoke of the garret, of the Saturday afternoon rambles with little Marjorie, of his uncle's legacy, of his ambition, and of the shattered Strad.—he did not even spare himself when he came to the cruel blow that had separated him and Marjorie for ever. When he had finished the recital he sat waiting impatiently for her verdict. But she did not speak.

At last he glanced nervously at her. Was it possible that she could be jealous of this little dead and gone tragedy of so many years ago—or was she merely bored?

Her face was as calm and impassive as ever, but her eyes looked bigger and darker than usual. If she had been any other woman the musician would have sworn there were tears in them.

"I've tired you, Vera?" he asked quickly. "These things sound foolish to you?"

She waited an instant before answering, loosening the cloak from her shoulders as if its weight had suddenly become too much for her.

"No," she said. "You've surprised me, that's all. But tell me, Raymond, if you had found her—this child, this Marjorie—would you have forgiven her—really forgiven?"

The great violinist pressed his hands together—his thin cheeks flushed.

"Heaven knows I would!" he said; "it is her forgiveness I want. That blow has haunted me like a deadly nightmare for twenty years."

"And you cared for her all the time?"

Her voice was softer than usual—there was even tenderness in it. Against his will, it drew from him the truth.

"I love her still, Vera. Forgive me, I love her still."

Then a very amazing thing happened.

His wife stepped suddenly forward, and heedless of damaging her rich satin gown and delicate lace, she knelt with bowed head at the musician's feet. Taking both his hands in hers, she covered them with kisses.

"Then forgive her, Raymond," she whispered. "She needs your forgiveness badly, for she too has been a coward—too great a coward to tell you the truth when you asked her to become your wife, and she saw you no longer recognised the child in the woman; such a coward that she gave you only her second name and not her first—such a coward that she has never shown you this."

She lifted a corner of her fringe and disclosed a small red scar, showing up sharply against the white of the skin.

For some minutes the only sound in the big drawing-room was the ticking of the little clock which seemed to hammer into their brains.

A great sigh left the lips of the musician. As one who awakes from some overpowering trance he staggered to his feet.

Then he stooped down and gently raised his wife, and, folding his arms about her, he held her tight against his heart as if he never meant to release her.

Again and again he kissed the disfiguring scar as if he would have kissed it back into comeliness once more.

"Couldn't you have trusted me, darling?" he asked at last. "What made you so afraid?"

And the woman whom Society called the "Iceberg," whispered the little word "Love!"

J. G. Jones.

He: "That fellow over there cheated me out of a cool million." She: "How could that be?" He: "Wouldn't let me marry his daughter."

Your Editor Chats.

A Personal Note.

At the risk of appearing egotistical, I should like to devote just a few lines this week to a brief chat about myself and my paper. I think that every reader will acquit me of boasting if I say that I believe *Short Stories* is at the present time a splendid little paper. An editor is always proud of the paper over which he has control, more especially so if his own particular paper is at the top of the tree of his contemporaries. And undoubtedly *Short Stories* is the best and brightest of its kind. The motto of its staff is "Unflagging Energy and Ceaseless Progression," and the motto is never unheeded. Popular as it has ever been, it has never been so popular as it is at the present time. I account for this by divers reasons. The picture covers have been so highly appreciated that I am sure that they must have brought some scores of thousands of fresh readers to *Short Stories*. Then again, it has been most gratifying to see the interest evoked by such series as our Unsolved Love Problems. The excellence and high quality of the stories, both serial and short, appeal to the vast numbers who like good fiction, especially when there are copious illustrations by clever artists. And, in conclusion, I may say that I have in preparation for you some startling new features, which I am positive will be liked by all. I have been induced to write these few words as a reply to the many letters I receive congratulating me on the quality of *Short Stories* and wishing the paper every success. The senders of these I thank most heartily.

"Brian Cresswell's Choice."

I shall have much pleasure in announcing next week the name of the winner of the guinea offered in connection with the Eleventh Unsolved Love Problem. Readers who wish to enter for the Twelfth Problem must note that the closing day is next Friday, May 6th.

Pity the Poor.

The spirit of holidays is in the air. You, gentle reader, are considering where you shall spend your summer vacation, away from the worry of work. You, perhaps a unit of London or of one of our great commercial cities, are "tired of the din and rattle of wheels, sick of the dust," and are pining for the brief spell of a more open existence in the country or at the seaside. The knowledge that you will soon realise your wishes is comforting in the extreme. It gives you greater heart for the work that you needs must do.

But there are others—others, on the threshold of life, who from year's end to year's end never get out of the slums in which they abide, never taste of the great and glorious fields, shining under a great and glorious sun, that are but a few miles away. So near and yet so far. So pitiful and yet so true.

Won't you, more Providence-blessed reader, lend a helping hand to the children whose vision of Paradise is fields—green fields? It is within your means to give one poor unfortunate a whole day's transportation from misery to joy. Ninepence is all that is required—ninepence that is judiciously spent. You send along your donation, and the organisers of Pearson's Fresh Air Fund do all the rest. For every ninepence received one child of the slums spends a day in the country.

Send along your ninepences (as many as you can spare) to the Hon. Secretary of the Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The Editor.

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AN UGLY DUCKLING.

. . . And a Collie Dog. . . .

He was just a ball of orange and white fluff. But I ought to begin at the beginning.

Dicker, our coachman, brought him to me first. He came to me one morning when I was in the garden, and said :

"I thought you'd like to see this, miss, he seemed just the sort what you could fancy." He unfastened his coat, and from inside it two shining eyes looked into mine, and an orange and white paw was thrust out in friendly greeting.

I nearly screamed with delight.

"Oh, Dicker," I said, "how lovely—how lovely ! What is he ? Where did you get him ?"

"'Tis a collie pup, miss, six weeks old. I found they had a litter of them up at Mr. Grindlay's, and I thought maybe you'd like one—if——"

As Dicker spoke he was drawing from under his coat the most fascinating person I ever saw. He was just what I said first—a ball of orange and white fluff and he had a tiny feathery tail, and a pointed nose and two of the brightest eyes that ever looked out of a dog's face.

"Oh, Dicker !" I exclaimed, "if only I might have him—I wonder if father would let me keep him—I should love him so."

"You might take him in and ask the master now, miss; he's in the library," Dicker suggested. Dicker had been our coachman ever since I was a baby and he and I were fast friends.

So I picked up the puppy and scurried round the terrace and arrived breathless at the library door, and just listened outside for a moment, because I knew that if my step-mother were in there I had no chance of getting the dog. My step-mother and I didn't agree very nicely, but father and I—well, father and I were like chums.

The library was quite quiet, and I opened the door softly and went in.

Father was by himself, sitting writing at the table. He held out his hand and smiled.

"Well, my child !" he said.

"Dad, did you ever in all your life see anything so lovely ?" I answered him, laying the collie pup on his knee with one hand and putting my free arm round his neck. "Dad, I do want him," and I laid my cheek against father's dear grey head. The puppy looked into father's face, and lifted one of its paws in a pleading sort of way.

Father smiled.

"But, my dear," he said doubtfully, "I don't know what your mother will say."

"Dad, I promise you he sha'n't get into mamma's or anybody's way. I'll train him ever so well."

(I never would call my step-mother "mother." I don't know whether it was naughty of me or not, but I could not and would not do it.)

Father smiled again. I hugged him a little harder.

"Please, dad, dear." I whispered, "I don't believe I ever wanted anything so much in all my life—and he will be such a lovely companion for me."

Mamma said father always spoilt me dreadfully, and that I was odious in consequence. Perhaps I was odious; I don't know, but I think she really did contrive to provide an excellent antidote for any spoiling I got from father, because she never approved of anything I did, or was, or said. Well, after all, it doesn't matter much about all that. Anyhow, that morning father said :

"Well, well, my dear, if you will undertake to look after the dog yourself and not allow him to worry anybody, you shall have him. Only, mind, you must take entire charge of him."

"Rather," I answered, and I hugged father till he cried out for mercy.

Mamma always said I was nothing but a tom-boy, and that I should never learn repose of manner. I don't believe father cared so very much about repose; in his secret soul I think he liked his little "boy-girl." His second wife and her daughter were so very full of repose that there didn't seem to be anything else in them at all. "Icily regular, faultlessly dull," applied to them excellently.

Mamma was not at all pleased about Jock; she invariably called him "that horrid dog," but really he was not so very horrid ! He was never in her way. He was not allowed to go into any room in the house except the schoolroom, my own special sanctum, from which there was a separate stair into the garden, and Jock's education and mine went on there apace.

Though I was seventeen I still had a governess. Mamma said my education had been disgracefully neglected before she married father, and that now I must make up for lost time.

Father and I did not dare say a word, but I don't think we either of us thought I *had* been neglected, really. You see, I had done lessons always with him, and you don't know how dreadful it was to work with a governess afterwards. At first I used to cry myself to sleep every night, I was so miserable; but that did no good, and it made father miserable to see me unhappy, so I tried not to mind about my lessons. There were so many things to mind about just then that one more or less hardly mattered.

Father and I had lived oh ! so happily together for fifteen years of my life, and then—well, then somebody persuaded him that he ought to marry again for my sake, that I needed a mother's care, and so on, and he listened to what that dreadful busybody said and married Mrs. Lane, who already had a daughter of her own, and began by thinking me everything that was tiresome and disagreeable. Perhaps I was. But I do not think, looking back on it dispassionately, that I can have been quite so objectionable as my step-mother thought me.

Be that as it may, life was not very pleasant or endurable in the days when my collie pup first came to gladden my heart.

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I was a lonely little girl just then for a girl of seventeen. Till my father's second marriage I had been his constant companion, but it was soon plain that nothing vexed my step-mother more than to find me in the library with father, or to watch us strolling through the garden together arm in arm. So it was very occasionally now that my dear old dad and I had any of our happy talks. My governess was, well, she was middle-aged and well-informed, and a governess to her finger-tips, and she had not two ideas beyond seeing that I sat upright and learnt those stereotyped lessons correctly. My step-sister was twenty, and had been out two years and looked down upon me from a lofty height, so you see I was rather lonely—till Jock came!

He grew with amazing rapidity, chiefly at the legs. They became lengthy and spindly, and his fluffy body lost that puppy fluff which changed into beautiful silky fur, his tail grew more feathery than ever, and his dear eyes brighter and more loving every day.

He was not always an angel in his youth. He took a great deal of teaching. Like his mistress, he dearly loved mischief.

He and my step-mother steadily and persistently disliked each other, and though Jock was too much of a gentleman to be aggressive, he would never go near her if he could help it. My father he silently and unobtrusively adored.

He loved me with all the depth of his faithful doggy heart, in spite of the many beatings I had bestowed on him. Well, he had to be taught that it was not right to scurry downstairs and hunt for slippers to be devoured slowly on the dust heap in the garden.

It had to be impressed on him by tedious and painful means that to scrab a hole in the midst of the best flower beds was not a thing a self-respecting dog should do, and out of much tribulation it came home to him at last that sheep in the fields must not be chivied and hunted into a corner.

But he learnt all his difficult lessons at last and by the time he was a year old, and I nearly eighteen, Jock was a thoroughly well-mannered, well-brought-up dog!

Just before my eighteenth birthday my step-mother called me into her boudoir after lunch.

"Barbara," she said coldly, "your father and I think that it is time you left off being a child, and that you tried to be a little more grown up," she glanced at my short skirt severely.

My step-mother always made me feel nervous. I felt myself moving from one foot to the other in a maddening way.

"Do not try to shuffle about like that," she said icily; "it is quite sufficiently annoying to have to take out a girl so utterly indifferent to her appearance as you are without your adding to it by ungainliness. Nothing," she paused to give her words weight, "nothing will ever make you passably good-looking, but really you might try to attain to some sort of gracefulness."

"Am I to come out?" I blurted out, with utter disregard of grace of speech.

"Your father seems to wish it. *I* should have preferred keeping you at home for another year, till you have learnt to improve your manners and appearance a little. However," she shrugged her shoulders expressively, "when you have had a season, perhaps you will learn to be more like other people and not spend your whole time in going about with that horrid dog in the foolish way you do now."

It was on the tip of my tongue to say that I had no one else to go about with, but I luckily refrained, and after listening to a few more remarks on my personal appearance and my lack of good looks and qualities, I escaped.

Jock was lying outside my bedroom door and we went in together. I sat down before the glass disconsolately. It was all very well for my step-mother to say I did not care how I looked or what I wore, but no girl likes to be told she is plain!

"I wonder if I am so ugly, Jock," I said, and I leant my elbows on the table and looked long and earnestly into the glass. "I ought to be sure by this time that I am an ugly duckling. I've been told so often enough."

Jock sat and watched me with loving and adoring eyes. In *his* sight at any rate I was beautiful.

Out of the glass there looked back at me a small brown face, and two green eyes (eyes that were undoubtedly green). The mouth that smiled at me was not at all like buttons, or cherries or Cupid's bows, or nice things of that sort. It was rather wide, and when I laughed a great dimple came in my chin. My hair was always a sore point with my step-mother. It would not brush back smoothly, but rioted all over my head in curls that refused to be straightened by any comb in creation.

"I am an ugly duckling, Jock dear," I said, and Jock wagged his tail, "and I've got to go to London and dance at balls, and sit up and behave properly as a young lady should, and I'd much rather walk about with you in the country."

Jock wagged his tail again. "And it will all be as horrid as possible—if one's ugly, things are always horrid and I wish I wasn't grown up!"

Jock lifted a paw and put it in my lap. He quite understood the situation and sympathised with me entirely.

That same afternoon he and I wandered off to our favourite dell in the park, where the ground was golden with daffodils and sweet with the scent of violets; we generally went there when things were a little unbearable at home.

Jock lay on a bank of primroses and I lay with my head on his. He made a delicious pillow and before very long we were both sound asleep.

Jock's moving suddenly woke me, and I sat up with a start to find a tall stranger looking down at me with amused, grey eyes.

Jock was on his feet in a moment and on guard beside me, his eyes watching the intruder suspiciously.

"I beg your pardon," the stranger said, raising his hat, "but I think I have missed my way and am trespassing."

I saw then that he was not quite young—in fact, I thought him quite old, for he had a lot of grey hairs. His face was thin and brown and very kind, and his eyes made you feel at once that he was nice!

"Well, I'm afraid you are trespassing," I answered; "but it doesn't matter, because this is part of our park."

"It is very lovely," he said, lifting his hat again that the breeze might ruffle his hair; "I don't wonder you and your beautiful dog chose this place for your siesta."

"I *was* sound asleep," I laughed; "I never heard you come. Jock and I always come here when we——"

I pulled myself up short.

"When you what?" the stranger asked.

"Well, you won't say anything about it, will you?" I said, "but the thing is, when we are rather unhappy we come here, then we feel better."

By this time we had all sat down among the daffodils and Jock had expressed approval of our new acquaintance by giving him a paw.

"I am sorry you and Jock are ever unhappy," our new friend said gently; "what is it all about?"

"Well, this time it's because I've got to go to town, and come out, and be grown up—and it is *such* a bore. Jock and I are so much happier here."

"But—" a little amused smile came into the grey eyes watching me—"but surely you like balls, and fun, and all the other things young people enjoy."

"I've never been to a ball, and, you see, the thing is when you are very ugly, and awkward, and rather stupid you don't much like parties."

"No-o; perhaps under those circumstances one might not." He did not smile one bit, but his eyes still looked amused.

"Well, those are the circumstances," I answered nonchalantly; "anybody can see I'm ugly and awkward, and my step-mother is always reminding me of it, and I'm rather stupid, too. Besides that, I really like the country best, and Jock and I have a very nice time together, and, you know, I do so hate long frocks."

"Do you? They are a bore, I expect," he said, and his eyes twinkled.

I thought that most likely he had grown-up girls of his own, because he had some grey hairs and looked—well—looked quite elderly, and he seemed so kind and interested that I just went on.

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"And it isn't only long dresses, but you can't think what a bore gloves are, and veils—well, of course, one's face and hands get brown, but what *does* that matter? And if you're all dressed up in those sort of things, how can you possibly go long scrambles in the woods, or—or——"

"Or climb trees," the stranger put in mischievously.

"How did you know," I exclaimed; "perhaps your daughters climb, too, do they?" I asked eagerly.

"My *what?*"

"Your daughters. Haven't you got any? Oh, dear, I thought you must have, you seemed to understand so well." But the stranger put back his head against the trunk of a tree and laughed, and laughed.

"Do I look so old as all that?" he asked presently.

"Well—you look pretty old," I answered, contemplating him thoughtfully.

"I suppose I do," he said, and I thought his voice sounded a little sad. I could not help exclaiming:

"Oh, *please* don't mind about it, I really like old people best. They're much the nicest, and I simply can't *bear* young men."

"Can't you, why not?"

"Do you know, I never can think of one single thing to say to them, not one. They come to lunch sometimes, and my step-mother says afterwards that, with my education, I really ought to have more conversation. But nothing in my education ever taught me how to talk to young men. Old ones are easy enough—I could talk to you all day."

And at that he went again into peals of laughter. I can't think why.

Jock liked our new friend very much, and Jock was a very good judge of character. When the stranger got up to go a few minutes later, Jock got up too, and wagged his tail, and then gave him a paw again, and Jock only does this to people he really likes and respects.

That evening, when I went down into the drawing-room after dinner, I had such a surprise. There, standing by the fireplace amongst other guests talking to my father, was my friend of the afternoon.

He came forward at once and shook hands with me.

"I didn't know I should have the pleasure of seeing you again," he said; "I had no idea to whose house I was coming with Mr. Grindlay," then he turned and told father how we had met in my daffodil dell.

"This is Sir Reginald Ainslie, Bab dear," father said; "he is coming to settle at Upton."

"How jolly!" I exclaimed, for you see Upton was only five miles off, and I thought how nice it would be to have my new friend in the neighbourhood. I saw my step-mother looking daggers at me, but as I didn't know that I had done wrong, I didn't pay much attention to her, and when father said: "Take Sir Reginald into the conservatory, dear, and show him the roses," I went gladly.

"You haven't started on that new frock yet," Sir Reginald said, glancing at my white muslin, which certainly *was* rather short.

"No, I'm going to put it off till the last minute. You don't know how I hate them and everything that they mean."

"They mean growing up and having a good time."

"I don't know about the good time," I said.

"But growing up means ever so much that is pleasant to a woman," he persisted softly, pulling a yellow rose to pieces as he spoke; "it means seeing life and the world, and then marrying and——"

"Me *marry?*" I laughed; "that isn't very likely. No one in this wide world would ever wish to marry me, and I'm quite sure I don't want to marry anybody. I mean to be an old maid and live with Jock. He is really and truly nicer than any young man. He's always the same," I added.

"And men are not?"

"I don't think young men are," I said gravely; "they never seem to be the same two minutes together. Now, Jock is always the same."

"It will be a case of love me, love my dog, I see," Sir Reginald laughed.

"If you mean that if anybody cared for me he'd have to care for Jock too, you are quite right," I said. "I wouldn't go anywhere without him, and as for marrying—well—I don't want to marry at all, but I certainly shouldn't dream of marrying anybody who wouldn't take Jock as well as me! He's such a lovely dog."

I didn't quite understand the look that came into Sir Reginald's eyes when I said that.

"Faithful little soul," he said, and I wondered whether he meant me or Jock, only Jock's is a big soul, so he must have meant me!

It was quite funny after that how often Jock and I met Sir Reginald in the daffodil dell. I suppose he liked it just as much as we did. He and I had ever so many jolly talks about all sorts of things, and he never seemed to think me stupid or tiresome in my ideas, though I was only a little girl, and he so much older and wiser.

The time for us to go to London was getting horribly close, and I dreaded it more every day. We were so happy in the country just now, Jock and I, and—Sir Reginald; I did so hate trying on my new frocks with their long skirts, and mamma never seemed to lose an opportunity of telling me how badly I

I looked up and saw a tall, handsome gentleman raising his hat to me.

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walked, or how much I stooped, or how unfortunately plain I was!

And then something most extraordinary happened, so extraordinary that even now I sometimes have to pinch myself to see if I really am Barbara or somebody quite different!

One afternoon I came up to the front door, Jock as usual beside me, and I found father on the steps talking to Sir Reginald. Father's expression was half pleased, half bewildered, and he held out his hand to me and drew me close to him with a little tender movement.

"Well, my child," he said gently, and the look in his eyes puzzled me—it was full of love and wistfulness.

I looked at Sir Reginald. He was watching me, and something in his eyes made me suddenly turn away and pat Jock's head in a great hurry.

"Sir Reginald wants—" father began, then hesitated, his voice shook.

"I want you and Jock to come down to our pet dell for a stroll, will you?" Sir Reginald said, and there was a tone in his voice that made my heart give a funny little jump.

But, of course, I went with him. He seemed like a dear old friend now, and before we went father patted me on the shoulder and smiled down at me tenderly.

All the way across the park we never spoke a word. I don't know why I suddenly felt as though I had not anything to say, and Sir Reginald seemed struck with silence too.

Even Jock walked sedately and soberly like a very grown-up dog.

When we got to the daffodil dell we all sat solemnly down and still nobody said anything for a few minutes, and I began picking the daffodils round me from sheer nervousness.

Then—all at once Sir Reginald touched my hand softly.

"Little Barbara," he said, "do you know what I've been talking to your father about?"

I shook my head.

"I've been asking him a great favour."

"Well, then, I'm sure he'll grant it," I said. "Father never refuses people when they ask him things. I wonder whatever you wanted from him," and I forgot my nervousness and looked up at him, and again his eyes made me turn away quickly, and lay my hand on Jock's soft ears.

"He said"—Sir Reginald's voice was very gentle—"I might have what I want if—you will give your consent?"

"I?" I was so surprised that I jumped up. "Why, what have I got to do with it? It's much more likely to be my step-mother who would arrange any of father's business for him, not I."

"It's not exactly business," he hesitated, then took my hand into his and held it closely. "I asked your father whether, if you agreed, he would let you put off your season for a month or two, and then begin it—with me."

"With *you*?"

The clasp of his hand made me feel, oh! I don't know how, so happy, and yet as if I wanted to cry, and Jock seemed to understand, for he laid his dear head against me and wagged his tail.

"Yes, little girl, do you think you could be happy as—as the wife of an old fellow like me, and begin your first season with me to take care of you?"

"Do you want to marry *me*?" I asked, and I was so dreadfully surprised that I looked at him again; "you must have forgotten how very ugly I am, and, truly, I am most stupid and awkward," I spoke earnestly.

"Are you, dear?" he said, and all at once he put his arm round me and gathered me close up to him. "I don't think so—I think you're the dearest little girl in all this wide world, and quite the prettiest. And, Barbara darling, I am not so very old, you know."

The wistfulness in his voice made a queer sort of choking feeling come into my throat. I hid my face against his rough coat, and whispered:

"I don't think you're a bit old, and oh! Jock and I will be so very happy with you!"

"Jock is to come, too, then?" he said.

But I knew he was only laughing at me, because he drew my face up to his and kissed me, and Jock stood up and gave him his paw quite gravely, as though he were giving us his approval.

* * * * *

And as I write I am looking out of my window upon a lawn covered with daisies, where Jock is sitting looking extremely important and grave and responsible, whilst beside him on the grass kicks and crows and laughs a sturdy, grey-eyed person who is just learning the use of his two fat legs, and who grabs at Jock's orange and white coat with two chubby hands.

Jock adores him and he worships Jock, and do you know he is really and truly my son, though as I have told you, I often have to pinch myself to be sure that I am actually and really Barbara, the ugly duckling.

L. G. Moberly.

Aunt Matilda: "Why do you look so utterly wretched, Jimmy?" Jimmy: "I'm on good behaviour, aunt, when we has company."

"Are you married?" said the manager to a man who was looking for a situation. "No, sir." "Then I can't employ you. We find that married men know better how to obey than bachelors."

Mistress: "Mary, go to the door at once. Someone has rung three or four times." Mary: "Oh, it's all right. It's only that young feller as is mashed on Miss Maud. Yer needn't be afraid of his goin' away in a hurry."

The grammar pupils were saying their lessons. "In the sentence, 'I love you,' what is the mood of the verb?" asked the teacher. "Sentimental mood," replied one of the big girls, who had spent the last summer at the seaside.

Gentleman Visitor: "Is Miss Winterbloom in?" Servant: "No, sir; she told me to say that she waited for you until half-past four." Gentleman Visitor: "But I told her expressly I shouldn't be here until five." Servant: "Yes, sir; so I heard her say."

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A Nonsensical Notion.

Telling How Tom Dean Chose His Wife.

We had just finished breakfast. Tom laid down the egg-spoon he had been playing with, and looked across at mother.

"Aunt Anne, I think I'll take a wife," he said, exactly as he might have said: "I think I'll take another cup of coffee!"

"Take a wife?" repeated mother, by no means receiving the information as tranquilly as it had been given. "What for?"

"Well, I don't know," answered Tom, thoughtfully. "It's a notion I've got in my head, somehow."

"All nonsense!" said mother, sharply.

"Do you think so?" said Tom, apparently doubtful, but not in the least put out.

"Think so? I know it. What in the world can you want with a wife? After all these years we have lived so comfortably together, to bring home somebody to turn the house upside down! And, then, what's to become of that poor child?"

The "poor child"—that was I—reddening at being brought into the argument in this way, was about to speak for herself, when Tom interposed, warmly:

"I'm sure May knows I would never have any wife who would make it less a home for her—don't you, May?"

"Of course," said I.

"And I'm sure she knows nothing of the sort," persisted mother, "nor you, either, Tom Dean. How can you answer for what a wife may take it into her head to do, once you get her installed here? You can't expect her to forget, as you do, that May has no real claim on you."

"That I have no real claim on her, I suppose you mean, Aunt," Tom put in for the second time, just as I was getting thoroughly uncomfortable. "But, for all that, I intend to keep her—that is," added Tom, with one of his short-sighted blinks sideways at me, "as long as she'll stay with me, eh, May? And whoever has anything to say against that arrangement will have to go out of my house to say it—not that I'm afraid of any such result in this case—and, on the whole, Aunt Anne, I should like to try the experiment."

Mother smiled grimly, but Tom was so evidently bent on his "experiment," as he called it, that she gave up the argument.

"You can dance, if you're ready to pay the piper," she said, shortly. "And, pray, how soon do you mean to be married?"

Tom's face fell a little at this question.

"Well," said he, "I can't say, exactly. I suppose we shall have to be engaged first."

"What!" said mother, opening her eyes; "why, you don't mean to say, Tom, you haven't spoken to her yet?"

"Not yet," replied Tom cheerfully. "Time enough for that, you know, after I had spoken to you."

Mother, as a minister's widow, was not much given to the idle mirth that is as the crackling of thorns under a pot; but now she leant back, and laughed till the tears stood in her eyes.

"Well," she said, "if it was anybody else, I should say he was cracked; but you never were like other people, and you never will be, Tom Dean. But, at least, you have fixed on the lady?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Tom; "but, if you will excuse me, Aunt Anne, I would rather not say anything about her just yet; for, if—if anything should happen, it wouldn't be pleasant for either party, you know."

With which veiled allusion to his possible rejection, Tom took his hat, and left the room.

Our household was rather queerly put together. There was no particular reason why I should have been of it at all; for I was not really related to Tom, nor even to "mother," as I called her, though I am sure we were as dear to each other as any mother and daughter could be. She was the second wife of my father, who, like most ministers, had been richer in grace than in goods, and had left us at his death with very little to live on.

Then it was that Tom Dean had come forward, and insisted on giving a home to his aunt and to me, whom he had scarcely seen a dozen times in his life before. That was exactly like Tom—"queer Tom Dean," as his friends were fond of saying "who never did anything like anybody else." I suppose, in spite of his clear head for business, there is no denying that he was whimsical; but I am sure, when I think of his unfailing generosity and delicacy, I can't help wishing there were a few more such whimsical people in the world.

Naturally, at the time I am speaking of, my opinion had not been asked; all I had to do was to go where mother went, and, while she gave her energies to the housekeeping, I gave mine to growing up, which by this time I had pretty well accomplished. But perhaps for that very reason—for one sees with different eyes at twelve and eighteen—my position in the house had already begun to seem unsatisfactory to me; and the morning's words put it in a clearer light, since it had been used as an argument against Tom's marrying.

I knew that mother had spoken honestly, believing that such a step would not be for his happiness. But was not he the best judge of that? I knew him, if reflection should bring him round to her opinion, to be perfectly capable of quietly sacrificing his own wishes for my sake, who had not the shadow of a claim on him; so it must be my part to prevent his own kindness being turned against him now. Still, it was not so easy to see how I was to provide for myself, in case it should become advisable. What could I do? Draw and sing, and play tolerably; but not in a manner to compete with the hosts that would be in the field against me. Literature? I had read so many stories whose heroines, with a turn of the pen, dashed into wealth and fame. That would be very nice, only—I was not the least little bit literary. I had never even kept a diary, which is saying a great deal for a girl in her teens. The "fine arts," then, being out of the question for me, what remained? There was some outdoor situation, or a place in some family, and—and there was Will Broomley!

That may seem like going away from the point, but it was

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not. I was matter-of-fact; but I could see well enough what was going on right under my eyes, and I had a pretty clear idea of what was bringing Will to the house so often as he had taken to coming lately. There was a "situation," then, that would give me the home life I liked best, and felt myself best suited for; but—would it answer in other respects?

I overcast the long seam I was sewing twice over, I was so busy trying to make up my mind whether I liked Will Broomley well enough to pass my whole life with him; and even then I had not come to any decision, when I was called downstairs to see Letty Walters.

Letty was the prettiest, I think, of all my friends, and certainly the liveliest. Tom called her "the tonic," and used to laugh heartily at her bright speeches. I suppose it was this that made mother fix on Letty as his choice.

When I came into the sitting-room, I found a kind of cross-examination going on. It was amusing to anybody in the secret, as I was, to watch mother's artful way of continually bringing the conversation round, as if by chance, to bear on what she wanted to know. But it all amounted to nothing—either because Letty was too good a fencer, or because she really had nothing to betray. But, when Tom came home, mother took care to mention that Letty had called.

"What, 'the tonic'?" said Tom. "Too bad I missed her."

"But for your choice being already made," said mother, with a covert scrutiny of his face, "I daresay you might have as much of the tonic as you liked."

"But I go on the homœopathic principle, you know," answered Tom, with a twinkle in his eye.

After that mother's belief in Letty's guiltiness wavered. Her suspicions were transferred from one to another of our acquaintances, but always with the same unsatisfactory result.

"It passes my comprehension," she said to me, despairingly, one day. "I am positive I could tell the right one, by Tom's face in a minute, and yet I have mentioned everybody we know."

"Perhaps it is somebody we don't know," I suggested; "some friend of his whom we have never seen."

"What! a perfect stranger?" said mother, sharply. "Don't be so silly, child; Tom's not capable of that!"

I was silent, for I did not want to worry her; but that was my opinion, all the same.

The same evening—it was rather more than a week since Tom had hurled that thunderbolt of his at us—mother began about it openly.

"When are you going to introduce your wife to us, Tom? I suppose you have come to an understanding by this time?"

"Oh, there's no hurry," Tom said, as he had said before; but this time he did not speak quite so cheerfully. "The fact is," he continued, with a little hesitation, "there—there's a rival in the case."

"A rival?" repeated mother, with unfeeling briskness.

"Yes, a young fellow—younger by a good deal than I am," and Tom's face assumed an absurdly doleful look. "He is always there now. I confess I don't see my way clear; I'm waiting for her to make up her mind."

"And she's waiting, most likely, for you to make up yours," said mother, forgetting, in her propensity to right matters, that she was playing the enemy's game.

"There's something in that that never occurred to me," said Tom, his face brightening.

Mother saw her mistake, and made a counter-move at once.

"But the ways of my time are old-fashioned now; young ladies, nowadays, take matters into their own hands. If she cared for you, you may be sure she wouldn't have waited till this time to let you know it; that is, I judge by the girls I am in the habit of seeing; but if this one is a stranger to me"—(here mother riveted her eyes on Tom's face; oh, dear, my unfortunate words!)—"if she is an entire stranger, I cannot pretend to form any opinion of her, of course."

"Of course," repeated Tom, absently.

"Not that I have any such idea," resumed mother, growing warmer; "I have said, and I say again, that to bring a perfect stranger under this roof is not my opinion of you, Tom!"

I felt mother's words like so many pins and needles; for Tom was looking meditatively across at me, and though that was just a way of his, it seemed now as if he were reading in my face that the opinion was mine, and that I had been meddling in what did not concern me. I felt myself for very vexation getting redder every moment, till it grew intolerable.

"It is so warm here," I said, for an excuse, turning towards the French window, "I am going to get a breath of air."

I went out into our little strip of garden ground. Tom followed. I thought I should never have a better opportunity to say what I had it in my mind to say, so I waited for him by the bench under the old pear-tree.

"Sit down here, Tom," I said; "I've something to say to you."

"Have you?" said Tom; "that's odd, for I—well, never mind that just yet. What is it, May?"

"Tom," I said, still surer now he had misjudged me, and more resolved to set him right, "I want a place."

"A place?" repeated Tom, puzzled, as well he might be, by this sudden and indefinite announcement; "what kind of a place?"

"I don't know," I said; for, indeed, my ideas were of the vaguest. "I thought you might know, being in the way of such things. Now, pray, Tom," I went on, quickly, "don't fancy I am discontented, or—or anything of that sort. The truth is, ever since I left off school, I have wanted something to do, and had it in my mind to speak to you about it."

With this I looked at Tom, fearing he might be vexed; but he did not look vexed, only preoccupied.

"I do know of a place, as it happens," he said, after a while, "only I'm not sure how it would suit you."

"That's soon seen," said I. "What is it like?"

"Well, it's a sort of — of general usefulness——"

"Why, it must be to run errands," said I, laughing. "And where is it, Tom?"

"Well," said Tom, hesitating again, "it's with me."

"How very nice!" I exclaimed. "How soon can I have it?"

"The sooner the better, so far as I am concerned," said Tom; and with that he turned round and looked at me, and directly I met his eyes I knew somehow, all in a moment, what it was he meant; and I knew, too, at the same instant, that I could not have passed all my life with Will Broomley, and why I could not.

I am sure Letty Walters, who interrupted us just then, must have thought my wits were wandering that evening, and, indeed, they were; for I was completely dazed with the sudden turn things had taken. But Tom, who had the advantage of me there, took it quite coolly, and laughed, and talked with Letty just the same as ever till she went away.

It was rather late when we went in. Mother sat where we had left her, knitting in the twilight.

"Wasn't that Letty Walters with you a while ago?" she said, as we came up.

"Yes," said I, with a confused feeling of an explanation of something being necessary; "she just came to bring the new crochet pattern she promised me."

"H'm!" said mother, as much as to say she had her own ideas as to what Letty came for.

Tom had been wandering about the room in an absent sort of fashion, taking up and putting down in the wrong places all the small objects that fell in his way. He came up, and took a seat by mother. I became of a sudden very busy with the plants in the window, for I knew he was going to tell her.

"Wish me joy, Aunt Anne," said he; "it's all settled."

"Settled, is it?" said mother, in anything but a joyful tone. "So it's as I suspected all along. Well, you have my best wishes, Tom. Perhaps you may be happy together, after all; I'm sure I hope so."

This wasn't a very encouraging sort of congratulation, and Tom seemed rather taken aback by it.

"I'm sorry you're not pleased," he said, after a pause. "I had an idea somehow you would be."

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"I don't know from what you judged. But, there, it's no use crying over spilt milk. You'll be married very soon, I presume; I must be looking out for a house."

And mother stroked her nose reflectively with a knitting-needle.

"What for?" said Tom. "I thought of keeping on here all the same."

"I never supposed otherwise," said mother. "Of course I did not expect to turn you out of your own house."

"But what is the need of looking out for another, then?"

"Why, for myself."

"For yourself?" repeated Tom, in a tone of utter amazement. "Going to leave us—just now? Why, Aunt Anne, I never heard of such a thing!"

"Now, Tom," said mother, speaking very fast, and making her needles fly in concert, "we might as well come to an understanding at once on this subject. I am fully sensible of your past kindness—now just let me finish—I say I appreciate it, and have tried to do my duty by you in return, as I hope I should always be ready to do. I wish all good to you and your wife, and shall be glad to help her if ever I can; but to live in the same house with her is what would not turn out pleasantly for either of us, and, once for all, I can't do it."

"Aunt Anne," said Tom, pushing back his chair, and staring in mother's excited face, "either you or I must be out of our wits."

"It's not I, then, at any rate," retorted mother, getting nettled.

Amusement and a certain embarrassment had kept me a silent listener so far, but there was no standing this; I tried to speak, but could not, for laughing.

"I think you are both out of your wits together," said mother, turning sharply. "What ails the child? It's no laughing matter."

"You don't understand each other," I gasped. "Oh, dear! It's not Letty—oh—oh, dear!" and relapsed again.

"Not Letty?" repeated mother, turning to Tom. "Then why did you tell me so?"

"I never told you so," said Tom.

"Why, yes, you did," persisted mother. "You came in, and told me you were going to be married."

"Yes, so I am," said Tom, still at cross-purposes.

"Now, Tom Dean," said mother, rising and confronting him, "what do you mean? Who is going to be your wife?"

"Why, May, of course," answered Tom.

"May!" and then, after a pause of inexplicable astonishment, it was mother's turn to laugh. "Do you mean to say, Tom, it was that child you were thinking of all the while?"

"Why, who else could it be?" said Tom, simply.

"Well," said mother, "I ought to have remembered you never did do anything like anybody else. But, still, why in the world did you go to work in such a roundabout way?"

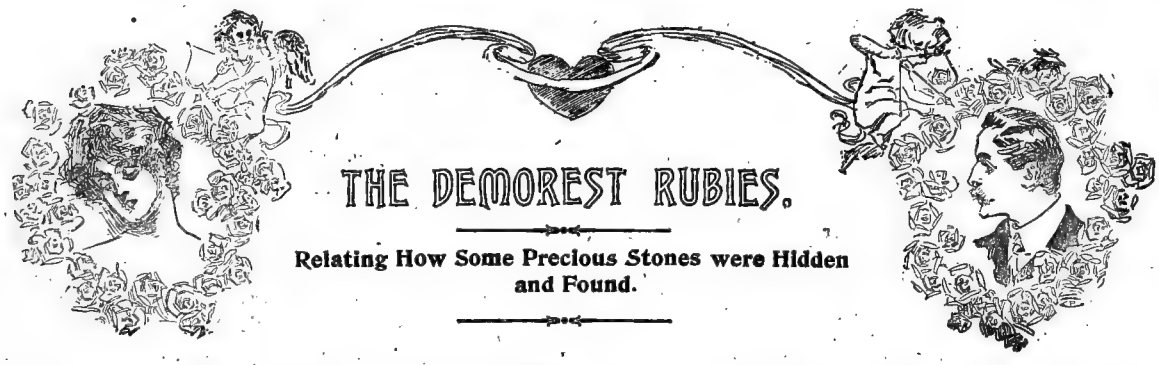
"I wanted to see how you took to my idea," said Tom.

"And how do you suppose we were to guess your idea meant May?" mother asked.

"Who else could it be?" repeated Tom, falling back on what he evidently found an unanswerable argument. It was no use talking to him. Mother gave it up with a shake of the head.

"And you won't want another house, then, Aunt Anne?" said Tom, suddenly. That set mother off again; Tom joined with her, and altogether I don't think we ever passed a merrier evening than the one that made us acquainted with Tom's future wife.

K. P. Owen.



THE DEMOREST RUBIES.

Relating How Some Precious Stones were Hidden and Found.

Yes, she was dead at last—Margaret Demorest of Stony Lodge—and the shock of her demise had shaken Rusper through and through. For years, her numerous relatives, each with an eye to the estate, had watched her movements from a respectful distance, which she herself had interposed between them, and their hearts had grown sick with hope deferred. But the grim looks of the old maid had not power to repulse the King of Terrors when his hand knocked at her gloomy door.

Heart disease, the doctors said, when she was found one morning with a smile of peace frozen on her stern and withered features. The relatives accepted the verdict with due resignation, following the remains of the "dear departed" to their final resting place amid an ostentatious display of crape and black-bordered handkerchiefs. But, when the will was read, the excitement of the heirs-at-law rapidly ascended to fever-heat. Always eccentric in life, Miss Demorest had retained that eccentricity to the end, and woven it into her last will and testament.

With the exception of a few bequests to her servants, the whole of her property, landed and personal, to wit: Stony Lodge, her present residence, with its beautiful park, which was a very Eden of loveliness, together with a splendid house in town and money to the amount of five hundred thousand pounds, was to pass into the sole possession of that one among her kinsfolk who should discover the hiding-place of the twelve Demorest rubies.

Should the gems remain undiscovered after the lapse of one year from the date of her death the estate was to be sold, and the legacy to be devoted to charity.

"The old cat!" muttered fashionable Mrs. Meredith, viciously. "She hid those rubies herself, the spiteful thing!"

"It is too provoking!" pouted her pretty daughter Maude.

"I shall contest the will," said thin-lipped Reuben Gray. "It cannot stand."

Mrs. Meredith was Miss Demorest's niece and Reuben Gray her nephew. The two were brother and sister, and the nearest akin to the dead woman.

Next came Margie Vane, child of a favourite nephew who was to have been the heir had he not displeased his aunt by marrying against her will, a girl of obscure parentage—"a pauper," Miss Demorest termed her.

Harold Vane had died some years back, closely followed by his wife; and the one daughter, Margaret, was left alone in the world and utterly penniless.

Mrs. Meredith had taken her—for the old aunt remained obdurate—and she was now serving in the capacity of maid to her beautiful cousin Maude.

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Margie Vane was not present at the reading of the will. Mrs. Meredith considered it unnecessary, and Margie herself had not the faintest hope of being remembered kindly by her father's stern old relative. When, therefore, they returned in anger and disappointment and gave an account of the wording of the will, Margie's hazel eyes opened wide in wonder.

"Whoever finds the rubies will inherit everything?" she asked, half breathlessly.

"By the terms of the will," answered Mrs. Meredith. "But I very much doubt if anyone will find them. Aunt Margaret was such a spiteful old cat."

"Oh, aunt, hush!" cried Margie, in pained tones. "She is dead now."

"So much the better for the community," said Mrs. Meredith, vindictively.

"Are you going to search for the gems?" Margie asked.

"Of course. There is just one chance in a thousand that I may unearth them."

"In which event you would find no further fault with poor Aunt Demorest's will," said the girl, shrewdly. "Oh, Aunt Jennie, may I go with you to the great house? I was never inside it."

"I suppose you may if you choose," replied her aunt, ungraciously. "In fact, Mr. Fay, the solicitor, insists that you shall take your chance with the rest of us. But it is extremely improbable that you will find the gems."

So that afternoon, and many ensuing afternoons, Mrs. Meredith, Maude, and Margie walked over to Stony lodge, and wandered fruitlessly about amid the treasures of bric-à-brac, statuary, books, and rare old china.

On one of these occasions Margie met Will Demorest, a distant cousin. He was a frank, handsome young fellow, with dark-blue eyes and close-curling, fair hair. His was the genuine Demorest face, the index of a strong noble character.

By occupation he was an artist in glass-blowing, having learnt the art in Venice. He had done considerable work for Miss Demorest, with whom he was a prime favourite. Indeed, there had been times when Mrs. Meredith and her brother Reuben had feared lest a will should eventually be drawn up in favour of this bright youth. But death had settled all that, and their fears were a thing of the past.

"So you thought you would have a look for the rubies with the rest of us," said Mrs. Meredith, with a sneer, as she found the young glass-blower examining the books in the library one morning. "Yet I thought you abhorred mercenary considerations."

"I am not in quest of the gems," Will replied, as his blue eyes rested in unmistakable admiration on Margie's fair, sweet face.

"Humph! I hope you don't take me for a lunatic or a fool, Will Demorest," was the scathing rejoinder.

"For neither, I assure you," said Will, with a bow. "Only at present I am more interested in pearls than rubies. Cousin Margie, may I show you the house? I believe I know it more thoroughly than most people."

Margie shyly acquiesced, and the two went off together, leaving Mrs. Meredith and Maude to continue their search.

"Are you anxious to find the rubies also?" asked Will, as they paused in the china closet to admire the cut-glass.

"I have not even looked for them," answered Margie, with a bright smile.

"Yet you have an equal right with the rest," persisted the young man, watching her face keenly.

"Oh, no, I have not, indeed," she said simply. "Papa displeased Aunt Demorest, as you know, and she has never taken the slightest notice of me. This being the case, I should not feel entitled to join in the search for the rubies, even if I desired to do so."

"They are magnificent gems," said Will, "and they were never set. I saw them just once, and they nearly took my breath away."

"I should like to see them," Margie said, musingly, "but oh, Will, were they more beautiful than these exquisite cups? Surely that is impossible."

The cups in question were indeed exquisite. Blown of the costliest Venetian glass, lily-shaped, with curled leaves for saucers and glowing with rainbow tints, they resembled nothing so much as a bed of gorgeous tropical flowers.

Margie's eyes sparkled as she looked at them.

"How lovely! How dainty! How fairy-like!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "See, Will, this one is exactly like an opal with a touch of fire; and here is an amethyst, and here a glowing emerald. Oh, Will, do look! See how that strange glow of hidden fire flashes from each! This one is jacinth, this beryl, and—Mr. Demorest, here is a ruby! Oh, the beauty! The real gems cannot be more superb."

As she spoke she took the ruby cup into her hand. Will half started forward as if to prevent her, but drew back again with a pale, startled face.

"But how fragile it is, Will!" commented Margie, turning it round and round. "Surely Aunt Demorest never drank tea out of them! And where did she find the beautiful things?"

Before he could frame a reply Mrs. Meredith and Maude appeared upon the scene.

"Margie," cried the former, "put down that cup and come along. I should think you would have more pride than to dawdle here all day talking with Will Demorest."

Margie's soft, hazel eyes filled with tears as Mr. Fay entered the room and from under his bushy brows glanced sharply at each of the group.

"Hunting for rubies, eh?" he said, sarcastically. "But Miss Margie seems to be the only successful one of the party. That is a rare bit of glass, Miss Margie, and was blown by our friend here," with a motion of his hand towards Will.

Margie's hand tightened on the cup in her surprise; her rosy fore-finger pressed a raised stamen in the calyx of the lily bell, when presto! change! it sank beneath her touch, and her startled eyes gazed straight into a small cavity where glowed a ruby of inestimable value, like a drop of rosy fire.

"Found!" shouted the solicitor, as his eyes also beheld the gem.

Will, very white, shrank back against the wall, while Mrs. Meredith and her daughter pressed closer to Margie and the lawyer.

"The rubies!" gasped the avaricious woman, making a dive for the other cup.

But the lawyer placed himself in her way.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "The discovery is Miss Margie's, and in accordance with the terms of the will of my deceased client she is sole heiress to the Demorest estate."

Mrs. Meredith grew pale with chagrin, Maude burst into tears, and Reuben Gray, who had heard all from the door, announced his intention of breaking such an unjust will.

"You may try it," was all Mr. Fay said to the threat.

Will came slowly forward and congratulated Margie on her good fortune.

"And my congratulations are none the less sincere that with them I resign the sweetest hope of my life," he said.

"Resign a fiddlestick!" muttered the old lawyer. "Miss Margie, that boy refused to be made Miss Demorest's heir, insisting that it would be an injustice to those nearer of kin. Then she made him blow these cups of tinted glass, with the central cavity and spring. She inserted a ruby in each cup, which, combined with the different tints, gave them their rich colouring. He watched her hide the rubies, and he has kept the secret. Does he not merit some reward?"

Margie flushed and glanced timidly at Will; then she looked round for her aunt and cousin. Both had disappeared.

"Take her, Will," said the old solicitor, with twinkling eyes, "and bless you, my children."

With a melodramatic gesture he, too, vanished, and I think the young people were not long in coming to an understanding; for cards are now out for their wedding.

The disappointed relatives maliciously declare that the whole thing was neither more nor less than an infamous conspiracy between Will Demorest and Mr. Fay. But Margie says the property is rightly Will's as he was the old maid's favourite, and in wedding him she is but giving him back his own.

Stanley Hammond.

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Circumstances Alter Cases.

She: "How hot it was in there! And I do hate to be squeezed in a crowd!" He (moving closer): "That is very natural, Miss Flossie; but—er—there is no crowd here, you know."

She Said "Ja."

Julie: "So you are engaged to Jack! You told me once that if ever he asked you to marry him your answer would be a word of two letters." Nellie (blushing): "I answered him in German!"

Ah! Flattering Courtier!

"What! You call me pretty? Why, I am an old woman; my hair is turning white, and, look, here is a wrinkle!" "A wrinkle! No, madam, it is a smile that has drifted from its moorings!"

Food For Thought.

Husband: "Are you aware, my dear, that it takes three-fourths of my salary to meet your dressmaker's bills?" Wife: "Goodness gracious, whatever do you do with the rest of your money?"

Cynicism.

The Adorer: "It's wonderful, old man, what love will enable a fellow to see in a girl that he never saw before!" The Onlooker: "No doubt! But it's equally wonderful what it won't let him see that he'll see later."

It Was Detachable.

Lady (at telephone): "Are you there? Are you Mr. Frizzle, the barber? Well, I want my hair done for a party this evening." Mr. Frizzle (at the other end of the wire): "Certainly, mum. I'll send a boy round for it in five minutes."

Very Absent-Minded.

She (after the elopement): "I have received a letter from my father. Dear papa is so absent-minded." He: "In what way?" She: "He inclosed a lot of millinery and dressmaking bills and forgot to put in the money to pay for them!"

Sheer Spite Again.

Maude: "Charlie Wiggins sent me a beautiful mirror for a birthday present." Clara: "That accounts for the funny question he asked me the other evening." Maude: "What did he ask you?" Clara: "If a woman ever got too old to be pleased with a looking-glass."

Foremost In His Thoughts.

"I suppose, colonel," said the beautiful grass widow, "that there often are moments when you wish you were again on the battlefield, thrilled by the roar and fired by the excitement of war?" "Yes," he answered, looking round eagerly for a way of escape, and seeing none, "even now the old feeling comes back to me."

What It Will Come to.

Visitor: "Rock-a-bye, baby, on the tree top——" Up-to-date baby: "Excuse me, madam, but I consider arboreal oscillation extremely dangerous."

And He Stayed On.

Fiancee: "George, can't you see what the face of the clock tells you?" Mr. Late-bird: "Yes, darling, but what the face of the clock tells me your face makes me forget!"

Hard Lines!

Frank Fairleigh: "Yes, Miss Antique, to be frank with you——" Miss Antique (with a chirp): "Oh, Mr. Fairleigh, of course you may be Frank with me; but this is so sudden."

A Secret Society.

Lulu: "We girls are getting up a secret society of our own." George: "Indeed! What's the object?" Lulu: 'I don't know yet, but I'll tell you all about it after I'm nitiated."

Very Remarkable.

Ada: "Flo was just going down for the third time when Dr. Watson dived off the yacht and caught her." Grace: "And saved her life! Wasn't that wonderful?" Ada: "Yes, for a doctor."

No Sympathy Needed.

Millionaire: "My dear Prince, I am so sorry you are engaged to my daughter. The crash has come, and I am ruined." Prince: "Oh, don't you worry about me, my dear sir; I can easily get another heiress."

Cause For Suspicion.

"Poor Mrs. Jaysmith," exclaimed Mrs. Gargoyle. "Her husband must treat her shamefully." "What makes you say that?" asked Mrs. Gummey, "she never complains." "I know it. That is what makes me suspicious."

Thankful For Small Mercies.

"Did you say there were accidentals in that music?" asked the father of the young lady at the piano. "A great many," answered his daughter. "Well, it's a great comfort to know that you were not doing it intentionally!"

A Nasty Knock.

Envious Young Man (speaking of favoured rival): "Yes, George is clever and handsome, but he is abominably conceited." Sharp Young Lady: "But, Mr. Dumley, if you were handsome and clever would not you be conceited?"

So He Did.

Mr. Hopeful: "Miss Wellthy, I adore you. Will you not be my wife?" Miss Wellthy (haughtily): "The idea of you proposing to a girl in my station! You should know better." Mr. Hopeful: "I do know better, but no richer."

Of Course They Don't.

"How lucky," said Mrs. Nuwed, "that I happened to pass that cigar sale this morning! These cigars are exactly the shade of George's new smoking jacket, and the smart little green bands round them will go with the lining beautifully. Men never think of these little things!"

Then He Collapsed.

Footinitt (energetically helping at bazaar): "Won't you take a share in a raffle for this cushion?" Lady: "Oh, no, thanks!" Footinitt: "Of course, it's rather useless and gaudy, and all that, you know; and personally I think the design rotten. But do take a share!" Visitor: "No, thanks! I made it!"

She Was Forgiven.

Mistress (to nurse-girl): "I hear that you are seen quite often speaking to the policemen in the park. I cannot allow that." Artful Maid: "I can't help it, ma'am. All the policemen in the park admire the baby so much—they will stop the perambulator to speak to him. They all say that he's the prettiest baby that comes into the park."

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START THIS SPLENDID SERIAL TO-DAY

A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

Mr. Theodore Racksole, American multi-millionaire, arrives at the Grand Babylon Hotel, and in consequence of an altercation with Jules, the all-important head waiter, he purchases the hotel for £400,000, with the intention of dismissing Jules from the staff.

Reginald Dimmock, English companion to Prince Aribert of Posen, dines the same evening with Racksole, who suspects that there is some sort of secret understanding between the young equerry and Jules.

The millionaire that night retires to bed very late, and is greatly surprised to see the waiter emerge from a room which he believes to be occupied by his daughter Nella.

Investigating the matter, Racksole finds that Dimmock is inhabiting the rooms, he having volunteered to change apartments with Nella, as a window of those she had intended to occupy had been broken by a stone flung from the outside. The millionaire accepts the explanation, although the circumstances of the case worry him considerably.

The next morning he learns that Miss Spencer, the bureau clerk, has left the hotel during the night, without giving any warning whatsoever.

Racksole dismisses Jules the first thing in the morning, forbidding him to enter the hotel again. Prince Aribert of Posen arrives, and Nella recognises him as a gentleman she has met in Paris as "Count Steenbock."

Dimmock is seen to drop dead in the quadrangle of the hotel. The cause of death is mysterious. More mysterious still is the way in which Dimmock's dead body disappears during the night—a coincidence being that Racksole discovers Jules in the hotel precincts.

Prince Aribert is in great grief, and tells Nella that he has been informed that his nephew, Prince Eugen, the hereditary Grand Duke of Posen, who is almost of an age with himself, has disappeared in Ostend or the neighbourhood. Aribert returns to the Continent at once.

On the morning following the Prince's departure, Miss Spencer comes to the Grand Babylon disguised as the Baroness Zerlinski. Nella sees her take a note out of a cream puff that is served to her at lunch.

Suddenly the identity of the Baroness as Miss Spencer strikes Nella. Discovering that she has set out for Ostend, Nella decides to follow her, and tracks her to a house in that town. Boldly confronting Miss Spencer with a revolver, she learns various important facts about the Dimmock mystery; but by a trick, Miss Spencer eventually bests Nella.

The latter faints, and, awakening, finds herself on board a yacht. Jules is approaching her.

The erstwhile waiter tells Nella that he has her in his power, but that he will release her if she will consent to marry him.

Nella boldly refuses, and suddenly Prince Aribert springs out of a dinghy a few feet away and knocks Jules down. They both eventually leave the yacht, and reach Ostend again, where Nella wires to her father to come to them.

A Mr. Sampson Levi, stockbroker, seeks an interview with Theodore Racksole at the Grand Babylon. The two men are attracted to one another, and exchange confidences. Racksole tells the stockbroker of the occurrences at the hotel, and Mr. Sampson Levi explains how he had an appointment with Prince Eugen in order to arrange the terms of a State loan. The Prince was wishing to marry Princess Anna of Eckstein-Schwartzburg, but could not do so until he had paid off his debts, amounting to one million pounds.

The disappearance of the Prince had complicated matters considerably, for the day had arrived when the money was to be paid over. If Prince Eugen did not appear he could not have the money.

Suddenly an idea strikes Racksole. Another pauper prince might be wishing to marry Princess Anna, and therefore it would be to his interests to stop the loan. Hence, perhaps, the solution to the disappearance of Prince Eugen.

That night Racksole discovers Rocco in the State bathroom embalming the body of Reginald Dimmock! Racksole intends to hand the chef over to the police, but by a clever ruse Rocco escapes. The next morning the millionaire receives Nella's telegram summoning him to Ostend. He at once journeys thither, and is told the whole story of Nella's adventure. When the two men are alone, Aribert tells Racksole that he has seen in Ostend a well-known Berlin actress whom he believes is concerned in the mystery of Prince Eugen's disappearance.

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Woman with the Red Hat.

"BUT how does this theory square with the murder of Reginald Dimmock?" asked Racksole.

"It does not square with it. My idea is that the murder of poor Dimmock and the disappearance of my nephew are entirely unconnected—unless, indeed, this Berlin actress is playing into the hands of the murderers. I had not thought of that."

"Then what do you propose to do to-night?"

"I propose to enter the house which Miss Racksole entered last night and to find out something definite."

"I concur," said Racksole. "I shall heartily enjoy it. But let me tell you, Prince, and pardon me for speaking bluntly, your surmise is incorrect. I would wager a hundred thousand dollars that Prince Eugen has been kidnapped."

"What grounds have you for being so sure?"

"Ah!" said Racksole, "that is a long story. Let me begin by asking you this. Are you aware that your nephew, Prince Eugen, owes a million of money?"

"A million of money!" cried Prince Aribert astonished. "It is impossible!"

"Nevertheless, he does," said Racksole calmly. Then he told him all he had learnt from Mr. Sampson Levi.

"What have you to say to that?" Racksole ended. Prince Aribert made no reply.

"What have you to say to that?" Racksole insisted.

"Merely that Eugen is ruined, even if he is alive."

"Not at all," Racksole returned with cheerfulness. "Not at all. We shall see about that. The special thing that I want to know just now from you is this: Has any previous application ever been made for the hand of the Princess Anna?"

"Yes. Last year. The King of Bosnia sued for it, but his proposal was declined."

"Why?"

"Because my nephew was considered to be a more suitable match for her."

"Not because the personal character of his Majesty of Bosnia is scarcely of the brightest?"

"No. Unfortunately, it is usually impossible to consider questions of personal character when a royal match is concerned."

"Then, if for any reason the marriage of Princess Anna with your nephew was frustrated, the King of Bosnia would have a fair chance in that quarter?"

"He would. The political aspect of things would be perfectly satisfactory."

"Thanks!" said Racksole. "I will wager another hundred thousand dollars that someone in Bosnia—I don't accuse the King himself—is at the bottom of this business. The methods of Balkan politicians have always been half-Oriental. Let us go."

"Where?"

"To this precious house of Nella's adventure."

"But surely it is too early?"

"So it is," said Racksole, "and we shall want a few things, too. For instance, a dark lantern. I think I will go out and forage for a lantern."

"And a revolver?" suggested Prince Aribert.

"Does it mean revolvers?" The millionaire laughed.

"It may come to that."

"Here you are, then, my friend," said Racksole, and he pulled one out of his hip-pocket. "And yours?"

"I," said the Prince, "I have your daughter's."

"The dickens you have!" murmured Racksole to himself.

It was then half-past nine. They decided that it would be impolitic to begin their operations till after midnight. There were three hours to spare.

"Let us go and see the gambling," Racksole suggested. "We might encounter the Berlin lady."

The suggestion, in the first instance, was not made seriously, but it appeared to both men that they might do worse than spend the intervening time in the gorgeous saloon of the Kursaal, where, in the season, as much money is won and lost as at Monte Carlo. It was striking ten o'clock as they entered the rooms. There was a large company present—a company which included some of the most notorious persons in Europe. In that multifarious assemblage all were equal. The electric light shone coldly and impartially on the just and on the unjust, on the fool and the knave, on the European and the Asiatic. As usual, women monopolised the best places at the tables. The scene was familiar enough to Prince Aribert, who had witnessed it frequently at Monaco, but Theodore Racksole had never before entered any European gaming palace; he had only the haziest idea of the rules of play, and he was at once interested. For some time they watched the play at the table which happened to be nearest to them. Racksole never moved his lips. With eyes glued on the table, and ears open for every remark of the players and the croupier, he took his first lesson in roulette. He saw a mere youth win fifteen thousand francs, which were stolen in the most barefaced manner by a rouged girl scarcely older than the youth; he saw two old gamesters stake their coins, and lose, and walk quietly out of the place; he saw the bank win fifty thousand francs at a single turn.

"This is rather good fun," he said at length; "but the stakes are too small to make it really exciting. I'll try my luck, just for the experience. I'm bound to win."

"Why?" asked the Prince.

"Because I always do, in games of chance," Racksole answered with gay confidence. "It is my fate. Then to-night, you must remember, I shall be a beginner, and you know the tyro's luck."

In ten minutes the croupier of that table was obliged to suspend operations pending the arrival of a further supply of coin.

"What did I tell you?" said Racksole, leading the way to another table further up the room. A hundred curious glances went after him. One old woman, whose gay attire suggested a false youthfulness, begged him in French to stake a five-franc piece for her. She offered him the coin. He took it, and gave her a hundred-franc note in exchange. She clutched the crisp, rustling paper, and with hysterical haste scuttled back to her own table.

At the second table there was a considerable air of excitement. In the forefront of the players was a woman in a low-cut evening dress of black silk and a large red picture hat. Her age appeared to be about twenty-eight; she had dark eyes, full lips, and a distinctly Jewish nose. She was handsome, but her beauty was of that forbidding, sinister order which is often called Junoesque. This woman was the centre of attraction. People said to each other that she had won a hundred and sixty thousand francs that day at the tables.

"You were right," Prince Aribert whispered to Theodore Racksole; "that is the Berlin lady."

"The dickens she is! Has she seen you? Will she know you?"

"She would probably know me, but she hasn't looked up yet."

"Keep behind her, then. I propose to find her a little occupation."

By dint of a carefully-exercised diplomacy, Racksole manœuvred himself into a seat opposite to the lady in the red hat. The fame of his success at the other table had followed him, and people regarded him as a serious and formidable player. In the first turn the lady put a thousand francs on double zero; Racksole put a hundred on number nineteen and a thousand on the odd numbers. Nineteen won. Racksole received four thousand four hundred francs. Nine times in succession Racksole backed number nineteen and the odd numbers. Nine times the lady backed double zero. Nine times Racksole won and the lady lost. The other players, perceiving that the affair had resolved itself into a duel, stood back for the most part and watched those two. Prince Aribert never stirred from his position behind the great red hat. The game continued. Racksole lost trifles from time to time, but ninety-nine hundredths of the

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luck was with him. As an English spectator at the table remarked, "He couldn't do wrong." When midnight struck the lady in the red hat was reduced to a thousand francs. Then she fell into a winning vein for half an hour, but at one o'clock her resources were exhausted. Of the hundred and sixty thousand francs which she was reputed to have had early in the evening, Racksole held about ninety thousand, and the bank had the rest. It was a calamity for the Juno of the red hat. She jumped up, stamped her foot, and hurried from the room.

At a discreet distance Racksole and the Prince pursued her.

"It might be well to ascertain her movements," said Racksole.

Outside, in the glare of the great arc lights, and within sound of the surf which beats always at the very foot of the Kursaal, the Juno of the red hat summoned a fiacre and drove rapidly away. Racksole and the Prince took an open carriage and started in pursuit. They had not, however, travelled more than half a mile when Prince Aribert stopped the carriage, and, bidding Racksole get out, paid the driver and dismissed him.

"I feel sure I know where she is going," he explained, "and it will be better for us to follow on foot."

"You mean she is making for the scene of last night's affair?" said Racksole.

"Exactly. We shall—what you call, kill two birds with one stone."

Prince Aribert's guess was correct. The lady's carriage stopped in front of the house where Nella Racksole and Miss Spencer had had their interview on the previous evening, and the lady vanished into the building just as the two men appeared at the end of the street. Instead of proceeding along that street, the Prince led Racksole to the lane which gave on to the backs of the houses, and he counted the houses as they went up the lane. In a few minutes they had burglariously climbed over a wall, and crept, with infinite caution, up a long, narrow piece of ground—half-garden, half-paved yard, till they crouched under a window—a window which was shielded by curtains, but which had been left open a little.

"Listen," said the Prince, in his lightest whisper; "they are talking."

"Who?"

"The Berlin lady and Miss Spencer. I'm sure it's Miss Spencer's voice."

Racksole boldly pushed the French window a little wider open, and put his ear to the aperture, through which came a beam of yellow light.

"Take my place," he whispered to the Prince; "they're talking German. You'll understand better."

Silently they exchanged places under the window, and the Prince listened intently.

"Then you refuse?" Miss Spencer's visitor was saying.

There was no answer from Miss Spencer.

"Not even a thousand francs? I tell you I've lost the whole twenty-five thousand."

Again no answer.

"Then I'll tell the whole story," the lady went on, in an angry rush of words. "I did what I promised to do. I enticed him here, and you've got him safe in your vile cellar, poor little man, and you won't give me a paltry thousand francs."

"You have already had your price." The words were Miss Spencer's. They fell cold and calm on the night air.

"I want another thousand."

"I haven't it."

"Then we'll see."

Prince Aribert heard a rustle of flying skirts; then another movement—a door banged, and the beam of light through the aperture of the window suddenly disappeared. He pushed the window wide open. The room was in darkness, and apparently empty.

"Now for that lantern of yours," he said eagerly to Theodore Racksole, after he had translated to him the conversation of the two women.

Racksole produced the dark lantern from the capacious pocket of his dust coat, and lighted it. The ray flashed about the ground.

"What is that?" exclaimed Prince Aribert with a swift cry, pointing to the ground. The lantern threw its light on a perpendicular grating at their feet, through which could be discerned a cellar. They both knelt down, and peered into the subterranean chamber. On a broken chair a young man sat listlessly with closed eyes, his head leaning heavily forward on his chest. In the feeble light of the lantern he had the livid and ghastly appearance of a dead man.

"Who can it be?" said Racksole.

"It is Eugen," was the Prince's low answer.

SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Release of Prince Eugen.

"Eugen," Prince Aribert called softly. At the sound of his own name the young man in the cellar feebly raised his head and stared up at the grating which separated him from his two rescuers. But his features showed no recognition. He gazed in an aimless, vague, silly manner for a few seconds, his eyes blinking under the glare of the lantern, and then his head slowly drooped again on to his chest. He was dressed in a dark tweed travelling suit, and Racksole observed that one sleeve—the left—was torn across the upper part of the cuff, and that there were stains of dirt on the left shoulder. A soiled linen collar, which had lost all its starch and was half unbuttoned, partially incircled the captive's neck; his brown boots were unlaced; a cap, a handkerchief, a portion of a watch-chain, and a few gold coins lay on the floor. Racksole flashed a lantern into the corners of the cellar, but he could discover no other furniture except the chair on which the Hereditary Prince of Posen sat, and a small deal table on which were a plate and a cup.

"Eugen," cried Prince Aribert once more, but this time his forlorn nephew made no response whatever, and then Aribert added in a low voice to Racksole: "Perhaps he cannot see us clearly."

"But he must surely recognise your voice," said Racksole, in a hard, gloomy tone.

There was a pause, and the two men above ground looked at each other hesitatingly. Each knew that they must enter that cellar and get Prince Eugen out of it, and each was somehow afraid to take the next step.

"Thank God he is not dead!" said Aribert.

"He may be worse than dead!" Racksole replied.

"Worse than—— What do you mean?"

"I mean—he may be mad."

"Come," Aribert almost shouted, with a sudden access of energy—a wild impulse for action. And, snatching the lantern from Racksole, he rushed into the dark room where they they had heard the conversation of Miss Spencer and the lady in the red hat. For a moment Racksole did not stir from the threshold of the window. "Come," Prince Aribert repeated, and there was an imperious command in his utterance. "What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know," said Racksole, feeling stupid and queer; "I don't know." Then he marched heavily after Prince Aribert into the room. On the mantelpiece were a couple of candles which had been blown out, and, in a mechanical, unthinking way, Racksole lighted them, and the two men glanced round the room. It presented no peculiar features; it was just an ordinary room, rather small, rather mean, rather shabby, with an ugly wall-paper and ugly pictures in ugly frames. Thrown over a chair was a man's evening-dress jacket. The door was closed. Prince Aribert turned the knob,, but he could not open it.

"It's locked," he said. "Evidently they know we're here."

"Nonsense," said Racksole brusquely; "how can they

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know?" And, taking hold of the knob, he violently shook the door, and it opened. "I told you it wasn't locked," he added, and this small success of opening the door seemed to steady the man. It was a curious psychological effect, this terrorising (for it amounted to that) of two courageous, full-grown men by the mere apparition of a helpless creature in a cellar. Gradually they both recovered from it. The next moment they were out in the passage which led to the front door of the house. The front door stood open. They looked into the street, up and down, but there was not a soul in sight. The street, lighted by three gas-lamps only, seemed strangely sinister and mysterious.

"She has gone, that's clear," said Racksole, meaning the woman with the red hat.

"And Miss Spencer after her, do you think?" questioned Aribert.

"No. She would stay. She would never dare to leave. Let us find the cellar steps."

The cellar steps were happily not difficult to discover, for in moving a pace backwards Prince Aribert had a narrow escape of precipitating himself to the bottom of them. The lantern showed that they were built on a curve. Silently Racksole resumed possession of the lantern and went first, the Prince close behind him. At the foot was a short passage, and in this passage crouched the figure of a woman. Her eyes threw back the rays of the lantern, shining like a cat's at midnight. Then, as the men went nearer, they saw that it was Miss Spencer who barred their way. She seemed half kneeling on the stone floor, and in one hand she held what at first appeared to be a dagger, but which proved to be nothing more romantic than a rather long bread-knife.

"I heard you, I heard you!" she exclaimed. "Get back; you mustn't come here."

There was a desperate and dangerous look on her face, and her form shook with scarcely controlled passionate energy.

"Now, see here, Miss Spencer," Racksole said calmly, "I guess we've had enough of this fandango. You'd better get up and clear out, or we'll just have to drag you off."

He went calmly up to her, the lantern in his hand. Without another word she struck the knife into his arm, and the lantern fell extinguished. Racksole gave a cry, rather of angry surprise than of pain, and retreated a few steps. In the darkness they could still perceive the glint of her eyes.

"I told you you mustn't come here," the woman said. "Now get back."

Racksole positively laughed. It was a queer laugh, but he laughed, and he could not help it. The idea of this woman, this bureau clerk, stopping his progress and that of Prince Aribert by means of a bread-knife aroused his sense of humour. He struck a match, relighted the candle, and faced Miss Spencer once more.

"I'll do it again," she said, with a note of hard resolve.

"Oh, no, you won't, my girl," said Racksole; and he pulled out his revolver, cocked it, and raised his hand.

"Put down that plaything of yours," he said firmly.

"No," she answered.

"I shall shoot."

She pressed her lips together.

"I shall shoot," he repeated. "One—two—three."

Bang, bang! He had fired twice, purposely missing her.

Miss Spencer never blanched. Racksole was tremendously surprised—and he would have been a thousandfold more surprised could he have contrasted her behaviour now with her abject terror on the previous evening when Nella had threatened her.

"You've got a bit of pluck," he said, "but it won't help you. Why won't you let us pass?"

As a matter of fact, pluck was just what she had not, really. She had merely subordinated one terror to another. She was desperately afraid of Racksole's revolver, but she was much more afraid of something else.

Eugen—poisoned by his own hand—lay 'twixt life and death! Would he recover or not? This dramatic episode will be related in a forthcoming instalment of this splendid serial.

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"Why won't you let us pass?"

"I daren't," she said, with a plaintive tremor; "Tom put me in charge."

That was all. The men could see tears running down her poor wrinkled face. Theodore Racksole began to take off his light overcoat.

"I see I must take my coat off to you," he said, and he almost smiled. Then, with a quick movement, he threw the coat over Miss Spencer's head and flew at her, seizing both her arms, while Prince Aribert assisted.

Her struggles ceased—she was beaten.

"That's all right," said Racksole; "I could never have used that revolver—to mean business with it, of course."

They carried her, unresisting, upstairs and on to the upper floor, where they locked her in a bedroom. She lay on the bed as if exhausted.

"Now for my poor Eugen," said Prince Aribert.

"Don't you think we'd better search the house first?" Racksole suggested; "it will be safer to know just how we stand. We can't afford any ambushes or things of that kind, you know."

The Prince agreed, and they searched the house from top to bottom, but found no one. Then, having locked the front door and the French window of the sitting-room, they proceeded again to the cellar.

Here a new obstacle confronted them. The cellar door was, of course, locked; there was no sign of a key, and it appeared to be a heavy door. They were compelled to return to the bedroom where Miss Spencer was incarcerated, in order to demand the key of the cellar from her. She still lay without movement on the bed.

"Tom's got it," she replied rantly, to their question; "Tom's got it, I swear to you. He took it for safety."

"Then how do you feed your prisoner?" Racksole asked sharply.

"Through the grating," she answered.

Both men shuddered. They felt she was speaking the truth. For the third time they went to the cellar door. In vain Racksole thrust himself against it; he could do no more than shake it.

"Let's try both together," said Prince Aribert. "Now!" There was a crack. "Again," said Prince Aribert. There was another crack, and then the upper hinge gave way. The rest was easy. Over the wreck of the door they entered Prince Eugen's prison.

The captive still sat on his chair. The terrific noise and bustle of breaking down the door seemed not to have aroused him from his lethargy, but when Prince Aribert spoke to him in German he looked at his uncle.

"Will you not come with us, Eugen?" said Prince Aribert; "you needn't stay here any longer, you know."

"Leave me alone," was the strange reply; "leave me alone. What do you want?"

"We are here to get you out of this scrape," said Aribert gently. Racksole stood aside.

"Who is that fellow?" said Eugen sharply.

"That is my friend, Mr. Racksole, an Englishman—or, rather, I should say, an American—to whom we owe a great deal. Come and have supper, Eugen."

"I won't," answered Eugen doggedly. "I'm waiting here for her. You didn't think anyone had kept me here, did you, against my will? I tell you I'm waiting for her. She said she'd come."

"Who is she?" Aribert asked, humouring him.

"She? Why, you know! I forgot, of course, you don't know. You mustn't ask. Don't pry, Uncle Aribert. She was wearing a red hat."

"I'll take you to her, my dear Eugen." Prince Aribert put his hands on the other's shoulder, but Eugen shook him off violently, stood up, and then sat down again.

Aribert looked at Racksole, and they both looked at Prince Eugen. The latter's face was flushed, and Racksole observed that the left pupil was more dilated than the right. The man stared, muttered odd, fragmentary scraps of sentences, now grumbling, now whining.

"His mind is unhinged," Racksole whispered in English.

"Hush!" said Prince Aribert. "He understands English." But Prince Eugen took no notice of the brief colloquy.

"We had better get him upstairs, somehow," said Racksole.

"Yes," Aribert assented. "Eugen, the lady with the red hat, the lady you are waiting for, is upstairs. She has sent us down to ask you to come up. Won't you come?"

"Himmel!" the poor fellow exclaimed, with a kind of weak anger. "Why did you not say this before?"

He rose, staggered towards Aribert, and fell headlong on the floor. He had swooned. The two men raised him, carried him up the stone steps, and laid him with infinite care on the sofa. He lay, breathing queerly through the nostrils, his eyes closed, his fingers contracted; every now and then a convulsion ran through his frame.

"One of us must fetch a doctor," said Prince Aribert.

"I will," said Racksole. At that moment there was a quick, curt rap on the French window, and both Racksole and the Prince glanced round, startled. A girl's face was pressed against the large window-pane. It was Nella's. Racksole unfastened the catch, and she entered.

"I have found you," she said lightly; "you might have told me. I couldn't sleep. I inquired from the hotel-folks if you had retired, and they said no; so I slipped out. I guessed where you were." Racksole interrupted her with a question as to what she meant by this escapade, but she stopped him with a careless gesture. "What's this?" She pointed to the form on the sofa.

"That is my nephew, Prince Eugen," said Aribert.

"Hurt?" she inquired coldly. "I hope not."

"He is ill," said Racksole; "his brain is turned."

Nella began to examine the unconscious Prince with the expert movements of a girl who had passed through the best hospital course to be obtained in New York.

"He has got brain fever," she said. "That is all, but it will be enough. Do you know if there is a bed anywhere in this remarkable house?"

EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Night-time.

"HE must on no account be moved," said the dark little Belgian doctor, whose eyes seemed to peer so quizzically through his spectacles; and he said it with much positiveness.

That pronouncement rather settled their plans for them. It was certainly a professional triumph for Nella, who, previous to the doctor's arrival, had told them the very same thing. Considerable argument had passed before the doctor was sent for. Prince Aribert was for keeping the whole affair a deep secret among their three selves. Theodore Racksole agreed so far, but he suggested further that at no matter what risk they should transport the patient over to England at once. Racksole had an idea that he should feel safer in that hotel of his, and better able to deal with any situation that might arise. Nella scorned the idea. In her quality of an amateur nurse, she assured them that Prince Eugen was much more seriously ill than either of them suspected, and she urged that they should take absolute possession of

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the house, and keep possession till Prince Eugen was convalescent.

"But what about the Spencer female?" Racksole had said.

"Keep her where she is. Keep her a prisoner. And hold the house against all comers. If Jules should come back, simply defy him to enter—that is all. There are two of you, so you must keep an eye on the former occupiers, if they return, and on Miss Spencer, while I nurse the patient. But first you must send for a doctor."

"Doctor!" Prince Aribert had said, alarmed. "Will it not be necessary to make some awkward explanation to the doctor?"

"Not at all!" she replied. "Why should it be? In a place like Ostend doctors are far too discreet to ask questions; they see too much to retain their curiosity. Besides, do you want your nephew to die?"

Both the men were somewhat taken aback by the girl's sagacious grasp of the situation, and it came about that they began to obey her like subordinates. She told her father to sally forth in search of a doctor, and he went. She gave Prince Aribert certain other orders, and he promptly executed them.

By the evening of the following day everything was going smoothly. The doctor came and departed several times, and sent medicine, and seemed fairly optimistic as to the issue of the illness. An old woman had been induced to come in and cook and clean. Miss Spencer was kept out of sight on the attic floor, pending some decision as to what to do with her. And no one outside the house had asked any questions. The inhabitants of that particular street must have been accustomed to strange behaviour on the part of their neighbours, unaccountable appearances and disappearances, strange flittings and arrivals. This strong-minded and active trio—Racksole, Nella, and Prince Aribert—might have been the lawful and accustomed tenants of the house, for any outward evidence to the contrary.

On the afternoon of the third day Prince Eugen was distinctly and seriously worse. Nella had sat up with him the previous night and throughout the day. Her father had spent the morning at the hotel and Prince Aribert had kept watch. The two men were never absent from the house at the same time, and one of them always did duty as sentinel at night. On this afternoon Prince Aribert and Nella sat together in the patient's bedroom. The doctor had just left. Theodore Racksole was downstairs reading the *New York Herald*. The Prince and Nella were near the window, which looked on to the back-garden. It was a queer, shabby, little bedroom to shelter the august body of a European personage like Prince Eugen of Posen. Curiously enough, both Nella and her father, ardent democrats though they were, had been somehow impressed by the royalty and importance of the fever-stricken Prince—impressed as they had never been by Aribert. They had both felt that here, under their care, was a species of individuality quite new to them, and different from anything they had previously encountered. Even the gestures and tones of his delirium had an air of abrupt yet condescending command—an imposing mixture of suavity and haughtiness. As for Nella, she had been first struck by the beautiful "E" over a crown on the sleeves of his linen, and by the signet-ring on his pale, emaciated hand. After all, these trifling outward signs are at least as effective as others of deeper but less obtrusive significance. The Racksoles, too, duly marked the attitude of Prince Aribert to his nephew: it was at once paternal and reverential; it disclosed clearly that Prince Aribert continued, in spite of everything, to regard his nephew as his sovereign lord and master, as a being surrounded by a natural and inevitable pomp and awe. This attitude, at the beginning, seemed false and unreal to the Americans; it seemed to them to be assumed; but gradually they came to perceive that they were mistaken, and that though America might have cast out "the monarchical superstition," nevertheless that "superstition" had vigorously survived in another part of the world.

The Strange Tricks It Does.

At first this seems like a strange thing; almost an absurd thing. Can you account for it? "My case puzzled me," says Mrs. Martha Beverley, "and puzzled others. I had a good appetite and ate plenty of nourishing food, yet I lost flesh and got weaker all the time." The lady says she had suffered from indigestion and debility for twenty years. What do we mean by *debility?* Is it a disease? No, it is an *effect* of a disease.

"Food did not strengthen me," says Mrs. Beverley, "but often gave me much pain across the chest and between the shoulders. Often, when I stooped down, I could hardly straighten myself up again. As the years rolled by I got worse, and was always in pain after eating. My body would swell with wind and I had fearful griping in the stomach. Sometimes they made me faint dead away. For months I knew not what it was to have a good night's sleep. My breath was short and I was troubled with palpitation of the heart. To live was to carry a load almost greater than I could bear. I was pale as a ghost and was scarcely more than bones covered with skin. Now, however, thanks to Mother Seigel's Syrup, I am well and strong again.

"A friend (who was a friend indeed) argued its merits to me until I gave up and tried it. Mother Seigel's Syrup first cured my indigestion and all the pains, aches, and ailments that were caused by it. Then it made me profit by the food I ate, so I gained flesh fast; and with that came new life and strength. I used Mother Seigel's Syrup regularly for six months and it delivered me completely from a disease that had clung to me for *twenty years*, and came near laying me in the grave. What I would say to sufferers is this:—Use Mother Seigel's Syrup and *keep on using it*; don't doubt or get discouraged. Where one takes it now a thousand should take it."

When she made that statement on July 18th, 1900—four years ago—Mrs. Beverley lived at 102 Lumley Street, Middlesboro'. On February 18th, 1904—this year—at her new home, 154, Abingdon Road, Middlesboro', she made and signed this statement:

"Referring to my testimonial of four years ago, to the merits of Mother Seigel's Syrup, I am pleased to inform you that I have enjoyed good health ever since. I still take a dose occasionally on the principle that prevention is better than cure; but the old complaint never troubles me now. For twenty years I had endured the tortures of indigestion when Mother Seigel's Syrup restored me to health. From little beginnings it had come to be the haunting menace of my life. My doctor declared I should never recover, but he was wrong. Mother Seigel's Syrup restored me to perfect health, and I feel that I can never praise it too highly."

Indigestion does more tricks than any other necromancer. Watch it and use the Syrup immediately.

INDIGESTION

"Six or seven years ago," says Mrs. Mary Northey, 13 Hull St., Newcastle-on-Tyne, "I wrote you of the cure made in me by Mother Seigel's Syrup. I had suffered for years, and in 1897 was four months in bed when I began using the Syrup. Several doctors had failed to help me. My trouble was indigestion. Mother Seigel's Syrup saved my life. I have ever since been as well as any woman could wish to be."

YIELDS TO MOTHER SEIGEL'S SYRUP.

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"You and Mr. Racksole have been extraordinarily kind to me," said Prince Aribert very quietly, after the two had sat some time in silence.

"Why? How?" she asked unaffectedly. "We are interested in this affair ourselves, you know. It began at our hotel—you mustn't forget that, Prince."

"I don't," he said. "I forget nothing. But I cannot help feeling that I have led you into a strange entanglement. Why should you and Mr. Racksole be here—you who are supposed to be on a holiday!—hiding in a strange house in a foreign country, subject to all sorts of annoyances and all sorts of risks, simply because I am anxious to avoid scandal, to avoid any sort of talk, in connection with my misguided nephew? It is nothing to you that the Hereditary Prince of Posen should be liable to a public disgrace. What will it matter to you if the throne of Posen becomes the laughing-stock of Europe?"

"I really don't know, Prince," Nella smiled roguishly. "But we Americans have a habit of going right through with anything we have begun."

"Ah!" he said, "who knows how this thing will end? All our trouble, our anxieties, our watchfulness, may come to nothing. I tell you that when I see Eugen lying there, and think that we cannot learn his story until he recovers, I am ready to go mad. We might be arranging things, making matters smooth, preparing for the future, if only we knew—knew what he can tell us. I tell you that I am ready to go mad. If anything should happen to you, Miss Racksole, I would kill myself."

"But why?" she questioned. "Supposing, that is, that anything could happen to me—which it can't."

"Because I have dragged you into this," he replied, gazing at her. "It is nothing to you. You are only being kind."

"How do you know it is nothing to me, Prince?" she asked him quickly.

Just then the sick man made a convulsive movement, and Nella flew to the bed and soothed him. From the head of the bed she looked over at Prince Aribert, and he returned her bright, excited glance. She was in her travelling-frock, with a large white Belgian apron tied over it. Large dark circles of fatigue and sleeplessness surrounded her eyes, and to the Prince her cheek seemed hollow and thin; her hair lay thick over the temples, half-covering the ears. Aribert gave no answer to her query—merely gazed at her with melancholy intensity.

"I think I will go and rest," she said at last. "You will know all about the medicine."

"Sleep well," he said, as he softly opened the door for her. And then he was alone with Eugen.

It was his turn that night to watch, for they still half-expected some strange, sudden visit, or onslaught, or move of one kind or another, from Jules. Racksole slept in the parlour on the ground floor, Nella had the front bedroom on the first floor; Miss Spencer was immured in the attic; the last-named lady had been singularly quiet and incurious, taking her food from Nella and asking no questions; the old woman went at nights to her own abode in the purlieus of the harbour. Hour after hour Aribert sat silent by his nephew's bedside, attending mechanically to his wants, and every now and then gazing hard into the vacant, anguished face, as if trying to extort from that mask the secrets which it held. Aribert was tortured by the idea that if he could have only half an hour's, only a quarter of an hour's, rational speech with Prince Eugen, all might be cleared up and put right, and by the fact that that rational talk was absolutely impossible on Eugen's part until the fever had run its course.

As the minutes crept on to midnight the watcher, made nervous by the intense, electrical atmosphere which seems always to surround a person who is dangerously ill, grew more and more a prey to vague and terrible apprehensions. His mind dwelt hysterically on the most fatal possibilities. He wondered what would occur if by any ill-chance Eugen should die in that bed—how he would explain the affair to Posen and to the Emperor, how he would justify himself.

He saw himself being tried for murder, sentenced (him—a Prince of the blood!), led to the scaffold—a scene unparalleled in Europe for over a century! Then he gazed anew at the sick man, and thought he saw death in every drawn feature of that agonised face. He could have screamed aloud. His ears heard a peculiar resonant boom. He started—it was nothing but the city clock striking twelve. But there was another sound—a mysterious shuffle at the door. He listened; then jumped from his chair. Nothing now! Nothing! But still he felt drawn to the door, and after what seemed an interminable interval he went and opened it, his heart beating furiously. Nella lay in a heap on the door-mat. She was fully dressed, but had apparently lost consciousness. He clutched at her slender body, picked her up, carried her to the chair by the fire-place, and laid her in it. He had forgotten all about Eugen.

"What is it, my angel?" he whispered, and then he kissed her—kissed her twice. He could only look at her; he did not know what to do to succour her.

At last she opened her eyes and sighed.

"Where am I?" she asked vaguely, in a tremulous tone. "Ah!" as she recognised him. "Is it you? Did I do anything silly? Did I faint?"

"What has happened? Were you ill?" he questioned anxiously. He was kneeling at her feet, holding her hand tight.

"I saw Jules by the side of my bed," she murmured; "I'm sure I saw him; he laughed at me. I had not undressed. I sprang up, frightened, but he had gone, and then I ran downstairs—to you."

"You were dreaming," he soothed her.

"Was I?"

"You must have been. I have not heard a sound. No one could have entered. But if you like I will wake Mr. Racksole."

"Perhaps I was dreaming," she admitted. "How foolish!"

"You were over-tired," he said, still unconsciously holding her hand. They gazed at each other. She smiled at him.

"You kissed me," she said suddenly, and he blushed red and stood up before her. "Why did you kiss me?"

"Ah! Miss Racksole," he murmured, hurrying the words out. "Forgive me. It is unforgivable, but forgive me. I was overpowered by my feelings. I did not know what I was doing."

"Why did you kiss me?" she repeated.

"Because—Nella! I love you. I have no right to say it!"

"Why have you no right to say it?"

"If Eugen dies, I shall owe a duty to Posen—I shall be its ruler."

"Well!" she said calmly, with an adorable confidence. "Papa is worth forty millions. Would you not abdicate?"

"Ah!" he gave a low cry. "Will you force me to say these things? I could not shirk my duty to Posen, and the reigning Prince of Posen can only marry a Princess."

"But Prince Eugen will live," she said positively; "and if he lives——"

"Then I shall be free. I would renounce all my rights to make you mine, if—if——"

"If what, Prince?"

"If you would deign to accept my hand."

"Am I, then, rich enough?"

"Nella!" He bent down to her.

Then there was a crash of breaking glass. Aribert went to the window and opened it. In the starlit gloom he could see that a ladder had been raised against the back of the house. He thought he heard footsteps at the end of the garden.

"It *was* Jules," he exclaimed to Nella, and, without another word, rushed upstairs to the attic. The attic was empty. Miss Spencer had mysteriously vanished!

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

High School Young Ladies.

"TOBY" is very much in love with a young lady who has been educated at a High School. "The only thing I can't stand," he says, "is her manner. She seems to know an awful lot, and to be terribly conceited. In fact, she corrects me in everything, and makes me feel very awkward. Now, is there a cure for this? If not, ought I to go further in my courtship?"

* * * * *

Experience proves that nothing so soon wears off as the High School or University "side." When a young lady first leaves such a school, she is of course very full of her own superiority, just as a young man is on leaving a school to go to college. But very little contact with the world puts that sort of thing right. If "TOBY" is really fond of this young lady, he should put up with her manner for a little time, and if she is at heart a nice girl, of good disposition, she will soon get rid of her little failing, and, in the long run, be all the better for her High School education.

A Puzzle of Promotion.

AN interesting question about marriage comes from "NEWLY-WED." "I am just married," she writes. "My husband is an official under Government, I need not say what, and he has two courses of life open to him. One is to remain in a certain position, and earn a retiring pension in ten years' time. The other is to work up for a higher position, in which he would earn a much larger salary, but would not be entitled to a retiring pension until twenty-five years have passed. My husband himself says he thinks that he would enjoy life on a retiring pension in ten years much better than twenty-five years of hard work, even if he got a higher salary and better social position. I want you to advise me. I believe he will do whatever I wish. Personally, of course, I would rather he had the higher position and larger income, but ought I to respect his wishes in the matter?"

* * * * *

Everything must depend on your husband's nature. Of this you must be the judge. In a Government position a very energetic, capable man certainly ought not to retire when young, as his enforced leisure will probably a nuisance to himself and all with whom he comes in contact, especially his wife. That kind of man usually devotes his spare energy to household matters, with miserable results. On the other hand, if a man is naturally lazy, and has no ambition in the world, it seems to me that he might as well retire on his pension as keep up a pretence of work which he does not enjoy in a better position. However, this is a matter in which men nearly always yield to the wishes of their wives. If you yourself insist on his working for the higher position, and point out that your family—if there should be one—would be the gainers by your husband's increased income and position, I expect he will give in.

What the Young Man Said.

THERE was nothing at all to worry about, "WORRIED EMILY," in what the young man said. He meant that he had taken a great fancy to you, and was not merely a flirt, like so many other fellows. He didn't express that idea so well as he might, but, believe me, that is all he meant. The fact that he has called on you so many times, and that you have kept the appointments with him, and have grown to like him, is sufficient proof that you are safe in continuing the little affair.

A Question of Rings.

"HARRY B."—Your young lady means nothing in wearing a ring on the second finger of her left hand. It is a mere ornament, and not intended as a hint to you to place one on the third. I cannot advise you on the second question, which must depend on circumstances. However, if the matter is as you say, your fears are justified, and your action must depend on the extent to which you are fond of her.

The "Don't Dance" Man.

"I DON'T see enough of my best girl," writes "BERTIE." "I could see more of her if I went to dances, of which she is very fond. Now, I don't dance, and never could, though I get invitations. The point is, should I accept invitations to dance, under the circumstances?"

* * * *

It seems to me that there are only two courses open to you. One is simply to learn dancing without any delay. It might be a torture to you, but if you could just get through the waltz somehow, it would, at any rate, enable you to go to a dance. On the other hand, if you cannot learn dancing, you might accept the invitations, and then trust to the girl's fondness for you to pull you through without injuring herself. But it is a great test of a girl's love for a man if she agrees to "pull him through" a dance of which she is herself a good dancer.

Alone in Germany.

A LADY writes me from Dresden, in Germany, signing herself "PEARL." "I am over thirty," she says, "and have just a little private income. It is too little to enable me to live in Britain without working, but just keeps me in Germany. Now, I very much wish to meet a gentleman who may suit me for marriage, but I could not bear the idea of marrying a foreigner. Very few Britons come here who are at all likely to know me personally, so I am in an awkward position. Would you advise me to advertise in a British newspaper? Or is the class of man who answers such advertisements generally a rascal?"

* * * * *

I see no reason why "PEARL" should not advertise in a British newspaper. True, there would probably be a good many undesirable answers to such an advertisement, as the man who seeks a wife through the papers is usually not the ordinary type of man. Still, I have known of very happy matches being made in this manner, and "PEARL" might be so lucky as to find the right man. I should advise her to select a trusted friend to interview those who answer the advertisement, a friend able to see that the references were all right, and other details. It would, however, be far better if "PEARL" returned home, and met the gentleman for herself. One more word to "PEARL." Why this objection to foreigners? As you are living in a foreign city, would not your life be happier if you did marry a native? Foreigners, after all, are not bad fellows personally, if you get rid of your little prejudices, and many British girls are happily married to them.

Cynthia.

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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MISCELLANEOUS ADVERTISEMENTS.

Will be inserted in this column at the rate of 6d. per line of 8 words or part thereof. All advertisements should be addressed to Advertisement Manager, "Short Stories," 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., 11 days prior to date of appearance.

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